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Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Cooperation among the United Nations regional commissions".

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COOPERATION AMONG THE UNITED NATIONS REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

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Geneva 2015

United Nations

Executive Summary

Cooperation among the United Nations regional commissions

JIU/REP/2015/3

Objective

The objective of the present review is to assess the relevance and effectiveness of (a) cooperation among the regional commissions; (b) cooperation between the regional commissions and other United Nations system entities, especially in the framework of the Regional Coordination Mechanism; and (c) the interface between regional and global governance and decision-making bodies of the regional commissions. The report builds on issues raised in previous reports of the Joint Inspection Unit and other oversight bodies. As the focus of the report is on the various aspects of cooperation among the regional commissions, the analysis of the developmental activities of the numerous United Nations system entities at the regional level is beyond the scope of this study.

Main findings and conclusions

The Inspectors find that the regional contexts within which the regional commissions operate have significantly shaped their mandates and objectives and the ways in which they have evolved. These include the degree of regional cohesion, the level and evolution of socioeconomic development and the various ways in which globalization has affected different regions. As a result, they have developed differing strengths and focuses, including areas of divergence and convergence. The latter is evidenced through common subprogrammatic areas, with clear potential for cooperation, knowledge-sharing and learning from one another.

Key resolutions of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council have tasked the regional commissions with a number of pertinent roles. With the United Nations set to undergo a seminal change in its development pillar and how it functions, the Inspectors believe that the commissions can serve as a bridge between processes at the global, regional and national levels in implementing the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals. To that end, the regional commissions will need to adapt their legislative mechanisms, structures, procedures and practices and oversight architectures, and further improve the quality and effectiveness of their mutual cooperation.

The Inspectors find that incentives for cooperation do exist, for example, via access to additional resources through the Development Account and Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation. Those have provided tangible benefits, for example, the leveraging of resources, sharing of experiences and lessons learned, generation of synergies and multiplier effects and integration of the regional dimension in global development policy discussions. However, the current mechanisms in place for identifying and pursuing opportunities for mutual cooperation need to be improved.

Given that the executive secretaries of the regional commissions have a critical role to play in ensuring effective mutual cooperation, the present report delineates four recommendations to them to effect improvements in areas where existing mechanisms are not fully adequate. These include putting in place a formal modus operandi for the meetings of the executive secretaries (**recommendation 1**), developing and adopting specific terms of reference for the Coordinator of the Regional Commissions (**recommendation 2**), giving due consideration for the establishment of a common online platform (**recommendation 3**) and ensuring stronger ownership over the

Regional Commissions New York Office by adopting specific terms of reference that clearly define its functions, responsibilities, resources and accountability (**recommendation 4**).

With regard to cooperation between the regional commissions and other United Nations system entities, the Inspectors find that the commissions play an important role in bringing together relevant actors for norm-setting, consensus-building and follow-up on major global initiatives. The analytical and normative roles of the regional commissions are perceived to be their major strengths. However, views on the extent to which they should be operational and undertaking projects on the ground are mixed. The Inspectors also find a lack of clarity as regards the respective roles of the Regional Coordination Mechanism and United Nations Development Group regional teams, often resulting in overlap, competition and duplication of efforts. The Inspectors recommend that the Economic and Social Council review the objectives and modalities of the Regional Coordination Mechanism to strengthen its coordination role and clarify its interface with the regional teams (**recommendation 5**).

The Inspectors further conclude that a greater role can be played by the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations in strengthening cooperation and coordination under the development pillar and recommend that the Deputy Secretary-General serve as a facilitator between the regional commissions and other United Nations system entities and assist, as and when needed, in the resolution of outstanding issues between them (**recommendation 6**).

With respect to the interface between regional commissions and decision-making bodies at the global level, the review finds an insufficient level of perception by Member States at Headquarters as regards the added value of the work of the regional commissions. The present practice at the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council of dialogues between the executive secretaries and the legislative bodies does not fully address this perception deficit. The Inspectors recommend that the two legislative bodies task the regional commissions to submit to them on an annual basis substantive and analytical reports on their activities, which would enable the Member States to provide the commissions with the necessary guidance and oversight (**recommendation 7**).

The report also contains a number of soft recommendations aimed at encouraging cooperation among the regional commissions and with other United Nations system entities.

Finally, in the concluding observations, the Inspectors offer several suggestions of a more general nature, aimed at encouraging further reflection on the ways to enhance the cohesion and synergies across the United Nations developmental pillar.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The executive secretaries of the regional commissions should develop and approve, by 2016, a formal modus operandi for the effective conduct of their regular meetings, including preparation of meeting agenda, formulation of objectives, follow-up and monitoring of implementation of the decisions, by assigning corresponding responsibilities to the Chiefs of Programme Planning and the Regional Commissions New York Office.

Recommendation 2

The executive secretaries of the regional commissions should develop and adopt, by 2016, specific terms of reference for the Coordinator of the Regional Commissions that detail his/her roles and responsibilities, including term limit and the modalities for coordination, consultation, decision-making, representation and handover from the incumbent Coordinator to the next.

Recommendation 3

The executive secretaries of the regional commissions should explore the possibility of establishing a common online platform for knowledge-management, more systematic exchanges of lessons learned and good practices as well as an advocacy tool, in order to increase the profile and visibility of their activities and promote their products at the global level.

Recommendation 4

The executive secretaries of the regional commissions should adopt, by 2016, specific terms of reference that clearly define the functions, responsibilities, resources and accountability of the Regional Commissions New York Office, and adapt the job descriptions of the Director and the staff of the Office, as needed.

Recommendation 5

The Economic and Social Council should review the existing legislation relating to the objectives and modalities of the Regional Coordination Mechanism, building on inputs from the regional commissions consolidated in a report of the Secretary-General, and taking into account the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 67/226 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, with a view to strengthening the coordination role of the Mechanism and clarifying its interface with the United Nations Development Group regional teams.

Recommendation 6

The Secretary-General should consider requesting the Deputy Secretary-General to serve as a facilitator between the regional commissions and other United Nations system entities and assist, as and when needed, in the resolution of outstanding issues between them.

Recommendation 7

The General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council should invite the regional commissions to submit, on an annual basis, substantive and analytical reports on their activities for discussion under the pertinent agenda items, with a view to enabling the Assembly and the Council to fully benefit from the work of the commissions and provide them with guidance and oversight at the global level.

Contents

Chapter		Page
	Executive Summary	3
	Abbreviations	8
I.	Introduction	9
II.	Commonalities and differences across the regional commissions	12
	A. Key mandates and objectives	12
	B. Organizational structure	14
	C. Resources	15
	D. Coverage by subprogrammes	17
	E. Outputs	18
III.	Main resolutions and mandates for interregional cooperation between regional commissions and other United Nations system entities	19
	A. South-South and triangular cooperation	19
	B. Triennial and quadrennial comprehensive policy reviews of operational activities for development of the United Nations system	21
	C. Support to the United Nations functional commissions and expert bodies	22
	D. The post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals	23
IV.	Cooperation among the regional commissions	25
	A. Main incentives and tools for cooperation	25
	B. Levels and types of cooperation	29
	C. Mechanisms for cooperation	30
	D. The role of the Regional Commissions New York Office	36
V.	Cooperation between the regional commissions and other United Nations entities	37
	A. Level and type of cooperation between the regional commissions and other United Nations entities	38
	B. Cooperation on normative and analytical functions	39
	C. Cooperation on operational activities at the country level	40
	D. Regional Coordination Mechanism	42
	E. Cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs	46
	F. The role of the Deputy Secretary-General	47
	G. United Nations regional commissions and the post-2015 development agenda	48
VI.	Interface between regional and global governance and decision-making bodies	49
	A. Global governance structure	49
	B. Regional governance structure	50

C. "Disconnect" between the regional and the global structures and processes 51

VII. Concluding observations 55

Annexes

I. Members and Associate Members of the regional commissions 57

II. Selected examples of mandates/roles given to the regional commissions by the functional commissions and expert bodies 60

III. Number of staff at each level dedicated to cooperation during the biennium 2012-2013 62

IV. Recommendations on improving synergies and complementarities between the Regional Coordination Mechanism and United Nations Development Group regional teams/Regional Directors' Teams 64

V. Overview of actions to be taken by participating organizations on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit in JIU/REP/2015/3 66

Abbreviations

CEB	United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECE	Economic Commission for Europe
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
LAS	League of Arab States
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UN-Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNWTO	World Tourism Organization
UPU	Universal Postal Union
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization

I. Introduction

1. As part of its programme of work for 2014, the Joint Inspection Unit undertook a review of cooperation among the United Nations regional commissions. The topic was considered timely and relevant to ongoing debates at the global and regional levels on issues such as (a) the role of regional commissions in addressing global challenges, especially in the context of the post-2015 development agenda; (b) South-South and triangular cooperation; and (c) better harnessing assets in and among the regions for greater system-wide coherence and effectiveness.

2. The topic received a high rating from two of the regional commissions, namely, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), that responded to the request of the Joint Inspection Unit that its participating organizations signal their interest in potential topics for 2014. The United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) secretariat also rated the topic highly.

Objective

3. The objective of the present review is to assess the relevance and effectiveness of (a) cooperation among the regional commissions; (b) cooperation between the regional commissions and other United Nations system entities, especially in the framework of the Regional Coordination Mechanism; and (c) the interface between regional and global governance and decision-making bodies of the regional commissions.

Scope

4. For the purposes of the present review, "cooperation" is defined as any joint effort or operation. It can encompass both coordination and/or collaborative efforts. It can result in joint outputs, such as programmes, projects, events or publications, or any other joint activities, for example, regular exchanges of information between the regional commissions that do not necessarily lead to joint outputs. Cooperation can also be bilateral, multilateral, interregional, regional or subregional, and at the country level. It does not have to occur simultaneously among all relevant actors.

5. The review builds on issues raised in recent reports of the Joint Inspection Unit and other oversight bodies, as well as studies on the regional commissions. Findings, conclusions and recommendations from these documents relevant to cooperation among the regional commissions are referred to in the report wherever appropriate. The review is limited to studying the extent to which cooperation by the regional commissions facilitated the achievement of their objectives, rather than the extent to which the objectives themselves were achieved. It is not an assessment of how the regional commissions are fulfilling their mandates and programme objectives, which is usually

done through Joint Inspection Unit management and administration reviews and OIOS in-depth evaluations.[1]

6. The present review uses data from the budget for the current biennium (2014-2015) and, where deemed important for contextualization, historical data from the budgets of the 1980s onwards. Data on the outputs and cooperation initiatives of the regional commissions is from the last concluded biennium (2012-2013). Founding and historical resolutions and documents mentioning progress made on pertinent mandates given to the regional commissions are referred to where relevant. To ensure the validity of the analysis of meetings of the Executive Secretaries and Chiefs of Programme Planning of the regional commissions, the review uses summary records of meetings held during the past five years (2010-2014).

Methodology

7. In accordance with the internal standards and guidelines of the Joint Inspection Unit and its internal working procedures, the methodology followed in preparing present report included:

(a) An analysis of key documentation, for example, mandates contained in various resolutions of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council; previous studies by the Joint Inspection Unit, OIOS and/or the regional commissions on issues of cooperation; annual reports; programme budgets and strategic frameworks; work programmes; meeting records; partnership strategies; guidelines for cooperation; joint publications and projects; performance reports; and self-evaluations;

(b) Detailed questionnaires sent to the five regional commissions and the Regional Commissions New York Office[2] on the type and level of cooperation undertaken, resources dedicated, main partners, mechanisms for cooperation, outcomes achieved, challenges, the post-2015 development agenda, the role of the Office and other areas;

(c) More than 100 interviews were conducted on the basis of questionnaire responses with: the five executive secretaries, deputy executive secretaries, Chiefs of the Programme Planning (and other management functions) and staff of the regional commissions and the Regional Commissions New York Office. The team also met with management and/or staff from: the Executive Office of the Secretary-General; other United Nations Secretariat management and oversight offices; the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; the Department of Economic and Social Affairs; relevant funds and programmes, namely, the United Nations Development Programme including the Assistant Administrator and Director of the United Nations Development Group regional team for Africa, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the

[1] These include the Programme evaluation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (IED-14-004), the Programme evaluation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (IED-14-008), the Programme evaluation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (IED-14-002), the Review of management and administration in the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (JIU/NOTE/2013/2), and the Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the inspection of the programme and administrative management of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (A/61/61). Other relevant reports or notes of the Joint Inspection Unit include JIU/NOTE/2002/2, JIU/REP/94/6, JIU/REP/89/1, JIU/REP/87/2, JIU/REP/82/1, JIU/REP/80/13, JIU/REP/75/2, JIU/REP/74/5, JIU/REP/73/1, JIU/REP/70/3, JIU/REP/69/6 and JIU/REP/2009/9.

[2] It should be noted that the response of the Regional Commissions New York Office to the Joint Inspection Unit questionnaire was received almost six months after the deadline, following repeated reminders, and thus adversely affected the timelines of the review.

Empowerment of Women, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Children's Fund; specialized agencies (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the World Health Organization); and offices of non-United Nations entities based in the same location as some regional commissions (International Organization for Migration, Asian Development Bank and the League of Arab States). Representatives of Member States at the regional and global levels were also interviewed by the team;

(d) Missions undertaken to the headquarters of the four regional commissions and to United Nations Headquarters, including Addis Ababa (16-20 June 2014), Bangkok (23-27 June 2014), New York (7-11 July 2014), Beirut (1-4 September 2014) and Santiago (6-10 October 2014); meetings were also held with representatives of the Economic Commission for Europe in Geneva.

8. Previous evaluations or assessments of cooperation among the regional commissions have been few and narrow in scope and did not offer a comprehensive picture of what works and what does not. In order to mitigate this, in the present review, data was triangulated from multiple sources, including questionnaires and interviews, to strengthen the findings. One of the limitations of the present review has been that the data collected through the questionnaires on cooperation initiatives during the last biennium (2012-2013) were not reported consistently by the regional commissions. Some commissions were more detailed in their responses than others.

9. Another limitation, of a more general nature has been that some of the concerns raised in the context of the present report, for example, the absence of a common understanding among the United Nations system entities over their roles and mandates and the meaning of the "convening power" of the regional commissions, could not be addressed through the review, but would rather require a wider appraisal of the United Nations system and the roles and mandates of its component entities. As the focus of the present report is on the various aspects of cooperation among the regional commissions, the analysis of the developmental activities of the numerous United Nations system entities at the regional level is beyond the scope of this study.

10. Pursuant to article 11, paragraph 2, of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit,[3] the report was finalized after consultation among the Inspectors of the Unit so as to test the recommendations being made against the collective wisdom of the Unit. The draft was sent to the regional commissions, the Regional Commissions New York Office and other United Nations system entities for verification of factual information and substantive comments on the findings, conclusions and recommendations. Their comments have been taken into account, as appropriate, in finalizing the report.

Recommendations and follow-up

11. The report contains 7 recommendations: four addressed to the executive secretaries of the regional commissions; two to the Economic and Social Council, of which one is also to the General Assembly; and one to the Secretary-General. To facilitate the handling of the report and the implementation of its recommendations and monitoring thereof, annex V contains a table indicating whether the report is submitted for action or for information to the governing bodies and executive heads of the organization reviewed.

[3] See www.unjiu.org/en/corporate-information/Pages/Statute.aspx.

12. The Inspectors wish to express their appreciation to all those who assisted them in the preparation of the present report, and in particular those who participated in the interviews and so willingly shared their knowledge and expertise.

II. Commonalities and differences across the regional commissions

13. The five regional commissions are the economic and social arms of the United Nations Secretariat in their respective regions. They are the:

- United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA);
- United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE);
- United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC);
- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP); and
- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

14. Information on the year of establishment and a number of member countries and associate members[4] of each commission is provided in table 1 below.

Table 1: Year of establishment and members of the regional commissions[5]

Regional commission	Year established	Number of member countries	Number of associate members
ECA	1958	54	-
ECE	1947	56	-
ECLAC	1948	44	13
ESCAP	1947	53	9
ESCWA	1973	17	-

Source: websites of the United Nations regional commissions.

A. Key mandates and objectives

15. The supplementary paper to the present report[6] contains a description of the evolution of the mandates and objectives of the regional commissions since they were established, providing the background for a discussion on commonalities and differences among them. In terms of objectives and programmes, all five regional commissions aim to:

(a) Foster economic integration at the regional and subregional levels;

(b) Promote the regional implementation of internationally agreed development goals;

[4] Associate members are not independent members of the United Nations.
[5] The membership of each regional commission can be found in annex I.
[6] JIU/REP/2015/3_Supplementary_Paper.

(c) Support sustainable development by contributing to bridging economic, social and environmental gaps among their member countries and subregions.[7]

16. The five regional commissions assess ongoing socioeconomic trends and make projections for their regions, review policies and elaborate on possible consequences. With the exception of ECE, they also publish annual surveys of the economies of their region that compare and analyse data for each member country.[8]

17. The premise for the creation of regional commissions was to address specific priorities and needs of member countries at the regional level. The regional contexts within which the commissions operate have significantly shaped their mandates and objectives. Hence, each regional commission perceives its focus and specific strengths as being different from those of others:

(a) ECA has developed a close working relationship with the African Union following its establishment in 2000 and is viewed by its Member States as the technical arm of the African Union, complementing the capacity of the African Union Commission Secretariat.[9] It is recognized as the primary continent-wide platform for consensus-building. Since 2012, ECA has undertaken extensive consultations to reassess its activities in order to respond to the emerging needs and demands of its Member States. This has led to a comprehensive internal review on how it should retool itself, recalibrate its work programme and strategically position itself as the "think tank" of reference on African development policy issues;

(b) ECE is well-recognized as a multilateral platform for policy dialogue, negotiation on international legal instruments, development of regulations and norms, exchange and application of good practices, transboundary and cross-country issues and technical cooperation for countries with economies in transition.[10] The work of ECE on waterways, trade facilitation, food security, inland transport and road safety standards was considered highly relevant and useful by ECE Member States;[11]

(c) ECLAC has preserved its original "think tank"-oriented mandate.[12] Its integrated and multidisciplinary approach to development is appreciated by stakeholders and has helped the United Nations development system to shift away from "one-size-fits-all" policymaking. It is known for looking at development challenges from a Latin American perspective and furthering home-grown economic

[7] See www.regionalcommissions.org/?page_id=20.

[8] Yves Berthelot, "Regional and Global UN Entities: A Constructive Exchange of Ideas", Forum for Development Studies, No. 1-2005, June 2005.

[9] There is a merged governance structure between the two, and the African Union directly influences the Commission's priorities and programme of work. Co-location in the same city (Addis Ababa) has reinforced the close working relationship between the two entities. The overall objective of ECA is to assist African countries in formulating and implementing policies and programmes that will lead to sustainable economic growth and inclusive development, delivered in close coordination with the African Union through its New Partnership for Africa's Development. The commission was reported to have been instrumental in supporting the recent development of Africa's agenda for 2063 and the African Common Position for negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda.

[10] See www.unece.org/oes/nutshell/mandate_role.html.

[11] Two regional multilateral environmental conventions have been open to global accession and a number of regional legal instruments on transport have become global public goods. For example, the ECE European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road has been adopted globally and the Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Road has been adopted by countries outside the region. The ECE Protocol on Heavy Metals is the reference point for preparatory global efforts to reduce such pollution.

[12] See organization of the secretariat of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, ST/SGB/2000/5.

analysis and policy prescriptions, adding to the United Nations' credibility in the eyes of developing countries;[13]

(d) ESCAP is recognized as a platform for inclusive international dialogue, policy work and consensus-building among Member States to promote regional cooperation and action for sustainable socioeconomic development.[14] It has furthered initiatives in the realms of transport, information and communications technology, energy and trade connectivity, social development and environmental issues, and issues related to macroeconomic development and resilience to natural disasters;

(e) ESCWA is noted for its integrated and interdisciplinary approach to addressing the regional challenges of globalization and development. This is translated in specialized technical support to the League of Arab States in many areas, including the development of an Arab Customs Union as well as the formulation of regional positions and development strategies in other — in some cases sensitive — issues, including gender, environment, poverty, unemployment, inequity, population, food security, water and industrial diversification. It also has a specific mandate on addressing conflict-related issues.

18. The varying focuses of the regional commissions, as elaborated in the supplementary paper to the present report, result from the evolving priorities of their Member States. The regional commissions have adapted their activities accordingly to ensure that they remain relevant to the needs of their respective regions.

B. Organizational structure

19. Administratively, the regional commissions are a part of the United Nations Secretariat. They are each headed by an executive secretary, at the level of Under-Secretary-General, supported by two deputy executive secretaries at the D-2 level[15] (with the exception of the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe, which has only one deputy), the Office of the Executive Secretary and, usually, programme planning and administration divisions. The number of technical/substantive divisions varies from one commission to another: ECLAC has 14, ECA has 9, ECE has 8 and ESCAP[16] and ESCWA have 7. Furthermore, ECA, ECLAC and ESCAP have established separate sub-offices, headed by directors at the D-1 level and one staff member at the P-5 level for country offices. ECA has five subregional offices,[17]

[13] See Gert Rosenthal, "ECLAC: A Commitment to a Latin American Way toward Development", *Unity and Diversity in Development Ideas: Perspectives from the UN Regional Commissions*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

[14] See Programme Evaluation of ESCAP, July 2014, OIOS IED-14-008, page 11.

[15] Until the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2012-2013, the Executive Secretary was supported in each regional commission by one Deputy Executive Secretary at the D-2 level. An additional D-2 level post was approved, within existing resources, for each regional commission, except for ECE, through the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015 (see A/68/6 (Sect. 18) for ECA, A/68/6 (Sect. 21) for ECLAC, A/68/6 (Sect. 19) for ESCAP, A/68/6 (Sect. 22) for ESCWA and A/68/6 (Sect. 20) for ECE).

[16] ESCAP has eight subprogrammes covering the work of seven substantive divisions, 4 subregional offices and five regional institutions.

[17] In Central, Eastern, North, Southern and West Africa.

ECLAC has two subregional offices, four country offices and one liaison office[18] and ESCAP has four subregional offices.[19]

The Regional Commissions New York Office

20. The regional commissions are represented in New York by the Regional Commissions New York Office.[20] The Office was established in January 1981 on the basis of decisions taken in 1979 at the meeting of the executive secretaries and the second regular session of the Economic and Social Council (E/1979/76), following the Secretary-General's Proposed Programme Budget to the General Assembly. It was meant to "serve as focal point in New York for liaison between the regional commissions and the Headquarter units ... and keep the Executive Secretaries informed of all activities at Headquarters of interest to the Commissions and vice versa."[21] The objectives of the Office were laid down in 1981 in ST/SGB/183[22] and updated in 1984 in ST/SGB/205.[23]

21. The budget and strategic framework of the Regional Commissions New York Office is included in a separate section of the ECA biennial proposed programme budget. The expected accomplishments and performance indicators of the Office were changed in 2012-2013 to reflect its work in enhancing and catalysing contributions to interregional cooperation and synergies among the regional commissions through: (a) initiatives and joint policy and position papers submitted by and supported through the Office; and (b) acting as a clearing house for Development Account project proposals and as a member of the Development Account Steering Committee.[24]

C. Resources

22. Resources across the regional commissions vary considerably. Table 2 compares total regular budget and extrabudgetary resources of the regional commissions and the Regional Commissions New York Office. For the biennium 2014-2015, ECA has the greatest allocation of financial resources, followed by ESCAP, ECLAC, ECE and ESCWA. ECA and ESCAP have also had the highest average growth in financial resources over the past three biennia (2010-2015); ESCWA had the lowest growth in financial resources.

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[18] The Central American subregional headquarters, Caribbean subregional headquarters, Argentina country office, Brazil country office, Uruguay country office, Colombia country office and liaison office in Washington, D.C.

[19] In East and North-East Asia, North and Central Asia, the Pacific and South and South-West Asia.

[20] The name of the Office was changed in February 1989 from the Regional Commissions Liaison Office to reflect the substantive rather than purely liaison work done by the office (see JIU/REP/2007/10).

[21] See Programme Budget for the Biennium 1982-1983 (A/36/6 (Vol. I), para. 11.15).

[22] Objectives included: providing Member States in New York with information concerning regional commissions; assisting the Executive Secretaries with matters concerning administrative services; representing the Executive Secretaries at intergovernmental and inter-secretariat meetings; providing technical services for the meetings of the Executive Secretaries; maintaining a documentation reference service and collection of all technical and substantive reports issued by the commissions and distributing these documents; and performing other tasks required in the interest of promoting effective cooperation with Headquarters.

[23] The 1984 bulletin ST/SGB/205 specified UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF as particular organizations to follow up with on matters of interest to the regional commissions. It also tasked the Office to provide services for facilitating coordination and cooperation among the regional commissions in the planning and implementation of programmes and on issues of common interest to the regional commissions.

[24] See www.regionalcommissions.org/about-the-rcs/.

Table 2: Comparison of financial resources (regular budget and extrabudgetary) across regional commissions

Regional commission	Financial resources for the biennium in millions of dollars (Percentage change from previous column)				
	1984-1985	2004-2005	2010-2011	2012-2013	2014-2015
ECA	49	119 (141)	193 (61)	170 (-12)	230 (36)
ECE	25	63 (147)	93 (49)	92 (-1)	99 (7)
ECLAC	57	98 (74)	133 (36)	145 (9)	153 (6)
ESCAP	42	84 (100)	129 (54)	136 (6)	161 (18)
ESCWA	30	55 (85)	80 (44)	73 (-8)	82 (12)
Regional Commissions New York Office	0.6	1.4 (137)	1.93 (36)	1.9 (-2)	2.0 (4)
Total (rounded)	**204**	**420 (106)**	**630 (50)**	**618 (-2)**	**727 (18)**

Source: Proposed programme budgets for the bienniums 1984-1985; 2004-2005; 2010-2011; 2012-2013; 2014-2015 for each of the five regional commissions.

23. As for the number of posts, as indicated in Table 3, while it increased slightly in ECA between 2012-2013 and 2014-2015, all regional commissions have had an overall reduction in the number of posts between 1985 and 2015. This is in line with the rest of the United Nations Secretariat, which has faced regular budget cuts during the period. For the Regional Commissions New York Office, the average growth in its financial resources over the past three biennia (2010-2015) was about 3 per cent. The number of posts in the Office has remained steady since its establishment and staff costs account for the main bulk of its budget (over 94 per cent in 2014-2015).

Table 3: Comparison of the number of posts (regular budget and extrabudgetary) across regional commissions

Regional commission	Number of posts for the biennium (percentage change from previous column)				
	1984-1985	2004-2005	2010-2011	2012-2013	2014-2015
ECA	780	645 (-17)	625 (-3)	667 (7)	767 (15)
ECE	235	210 (-11)	226 (8)	214 (-5)	222 (4)
ECLAC	741	538 (-27)	534 (-1)	526 (-1)	515 (-2)
ESCAP	861	548 (-36)	532 (-3)	539 (1)	519 (-4)
ESCWA	344	291 (-15)	261 (-10)	260 (0)	251 (-3)
Regional Commissions New York Office	6	6 (0)	6 (0)	6 (0)	6 (0)
Total	**2,967**	**2,238 (-25)**	**2,184 (-2)**	**2,212 (1)**	**2,280 (3)**

Source: Proposed programme budgets for the bienniums 1984-1985; 2004-2005; 2010-2011; 2012-2013; 2014-2015 for each of the five regional commissions.

D. Coverage by subprogrammes

24. Table 4 indicates the main areas of coverage by subprogrammes, as presented in the proposed programme budgets of the regional commissions for the biennium 2014-2015. It shows extensive common ground in the areas covered by the regional commissions. They all address the environment, natural resources and sustainable energy issues, statistics, regional integration and trade, science and technology, gender issues, population and housing and all undertake capacity development to some extent. The majority also address macroeconomic policies and issues of social development and equality. Key subprogrammatic areas particular to a single commission are few, for example, conflict mitigation and development for ESCWA.

Table 4: Coverage by subprogrammes of the regional commissions[25]

Subprogrammatic areas covered (as per proposed programme budget)	ECA	ECE	ECLAC	ESCAP	ESCWA
Environment, natural resources, sustainable energy	●	●	●	●	●
Statistics	●	●	●	●	●
Capacity development	●	●	●	●	●
Regional/economic integration, trade and investment	●	●	●	●	●
Macroeconomic policy	●		●	●	●
Science and technology	●	●	●	●	●
Social development/equality	●		●	●	●
Gender issues	●	●	●	●	●
Transport	●	●		●	●
Population and housing	●	●	●	●	●
Development planning and administration	●		●		●
Financing for development	●		●	●	●
Agriculture, forestry and timber		●		●	
Conflict mitigation and de elopment					●
Subregional activities for development	●	●	●	●	

Source: Proposed programme budgets for the biennium 2014-2015 for each of the five regional commissions.

25. As shown in table 5, the financial resources dedicated to these subprogrammatic areas by each regional commission vary, thereby signalling their relative importance to the commission. While the main focus of ECE is on transport, it dedicates significant resources to environment, sustainable energy, trade and statistics. ESCWA and ECA dedicate a relatively large proportion of their resources to environment, natural resources and sustainable energy (28 and 19 per cent, respectively). ESCAP and ECLAC have a relatively large budget dedicated, respectively, to science and technology (16 per cent) and regional/economic integration, trade and investment (19 per cent). ESCWA dedicates 17 per cent of its budget to conflict related issues. A significant proportion of financial resources are allocated to the subregional offices in regions where they exist, i.e., in the case of ECA (29 per cent), ECLAC (21 per cent) and ESCAP (15 per cent).

[25] The coverage areas by subprogrammes were derived from the proposed programme budget for each regional commission for the biennium 2014-2015. On the basis of the information received from the regional commissions and the desk review, certain subprogrammatic areas are also indicated as being covered by the regional commissions, even though they are not explicitly reflected in the proposed programme budget.

Table 5: Distribution (as a percentage of total allocation for programme of work) of financial resources (regular budget and extrabudgetary) across the main subprogrammatic areas of the regional commissions[26]

Percentage of total biennial financial resources for programme of work allocated to the following subprogrammatic area	ECA	ECE	ECLAC	ESCAP	ESCWA
Environment, natural resources, sustainable energy	19.2	45	14.3	14.7	28
Statistics	12	12	8	12.5	9
Regional/economic integration, trade and investment	9.2	17	19.4	12.9	17
Macroeconomic policy	12	-	11.3	11.8	-
Science and technology	-	-	-	15.7	10
Social development/equality	5	-	7	9.8	13
Gender issues	5	-	3.3		6
Transport	-	20	-	7.9	-
Population and housing	-	3	6	-	-
Development planning and administration	3.2	-	8.2	-	-
Financing for development	-	-	2	-	-
Agriculture, forestry and timber	-	3	-	-	-
Conflict mitigation and development	-	-	-	-	17
Capacity development	5	-	-	-	-
Subregional activities for development	29.4	-	20.5	14.7	-
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Proposed programme budgets for the biennium 2014-2015 for each of the five regional commissions.

E. Outputs

26. Table 6 shows the distribution of regional commissions' outputs, and further highlights differences in the priorities and comparative advantages across regional commissions. The types of outputs produced in 2012-2013 by the regional commissions varied considerably, as indicated in the analysis of regional commissions' outputs reported through the Secretariat's Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System. For example, 81 per cent of ECE outputs involve the substantive servicing of meetings and provision of parliamentary documentation, whereas this figure for ECLAC is only 4 per cent. For ESCWA 38 per cent of outputs are classified as "other substantive activities", such as audiovisual resources, press releases, press conferences and other outreach events; contribution to joint outputs with other regional commissions or the United Nations system entities; and technical briefs and working papers.

[26] These are approximate indicators as the subprogrammatic areas are not equally defined across the regional commissions. In some cases, no specific allocation was signified in the programme budget (indicated by '-'). This does not necessarily mean that the regional commission has no expenditures in the area. As the indicators are based on the programme budget, they may not comprise all expenditures that a regional commission has in a particular area. Additionally, the table does not account for activities undertaken using Development Account and Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation resources.

Table 6: Distribution of regional commissions outputs (2012-2013)

Overarching reporting category	Percentage of total outputs classified as	ECA	ECE	ECLAC	ESCAP	ESCWA
Servicing of intergovernmental and expert bodies	Substantive servicing of meetings	11	49	3	23.5	14
	Parliamentary documentation	9.5	32	1	12	6
	Expert groups, rapporteurs, depository services	13	-	11.5	10	14
Other substantive activities	Recurrent publications	4	2	10	5	6
	Non-recurrent publications	8	4	24	3	5
	Other substantive activities	22	6	24	31	38
Technical cooperation	Advisory services	8	2	12.5	-	6
	Training courses, seminars and workshops	14	4	9	3.5	4
	Fellowships and grants	4	-	-	-	-
	Field projects	6	-	4	12	7
	Conference services, administration, oversight	0.5	1	1	-	-
	TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System records for the programme of work for the biennium 2012-2013.

27. **Despite these divergences, it is clear that all the regional commissions cover a range of common subprogrammatic areas, albeit with varying levels of emphasis. These common areas should serve to incentivize cooperation, as should the divergent strengths and the potential to learn from one another. In times of budget cuts, such incentives gain strength given the need to deliver efficiently with reduced resources.**

III. Main resolutions and mandates for interregional cooperation between regional commissions and other United Nations system entities

28. It appears that there does not exist an elaborate body of consistent legislative decisions by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council that gives mandates to the regional commissions to cooperate and collaborate with one another. Nevertheless, resolutions on three key areas, namely, South-South and triangular cooperation, quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system and the post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals, as well as those on support to the functional commissions and expert bodies, are seen to ascribe specific roles to the regional commissions. These resolutions indeed ascribe roles not only to the regional commissions, but also to various United Nations system entities present in the field, both at the regional and at the country levels. However, as the focus of the present review is on the regional commissions, particular attention is being paid to the roles assigned to the regional commissions by the body of resolutions in these three areas of significance for the United Nations system.

A. South-South and triangular cooperation

29. With four (ECA, ECLAC, ESCAP and ESCWA) of the five regional commissions located in and supporting development cooperation in the countries of the global South, General Assembly resolutions adopted over the past four decades

targeting South-South cooperation provided the necessary mandate and created a sustained push to further cooperation among United Nations system entities in those regions.

30. General Assembly resolution 3251 of 1974 endorsed the recommendation of the Working Group on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries to establish a special unit within the United Nations Development Programme to promote such cooperation and requested the regional commissions to prioritize measures addressed to them in the report. In 1978, following the General Assembly's endorsement of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries via resolution 33/134, regional commissions (along with other UN Development System entities) were requested by the Assembly to implement the Plan within their respective fields of competence.

31. In 1995, the General Assembly, in its resolution 50/119, specified that South-South cooperation was not a substitute for, but rather complementary to, North-South and triangular cooperation[27] and invited the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the regional commissions, to provide analytical and empirical material in that respect. In 2009, the General Assembly, in its resolution 64/222 on the outcome document of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, reaffirmed a key role for the regional commissions in supporting and promoting such cooperation and in playing a catalytic role in strengthening technical, policy and research support for countries in their regions in that regard.[28]

32. The General Assembly, in its resolution 68/230, requested the United Nations development system to "continue improving coordination among its agencies in order to enhance its support to South-South and triangular cooperation and monitor progress at the global and regional levels and to continue evaluating the support of the United Nations development system for those activities".[29] It invited the regional commissions to "further harness the knowledge network, partnerships, technical and research capacity in support of an enhanced subregional, regional and interregional South-South cooperation and to use the meetings of the Regional Coordination Mechanism, as appropriate, as a tool for advancing system-wide cooperation and coordination in support of South-South cooperation at the regional level."[30]

33. The Inspectors recall the Joint Inspection Unit report on South-South and triangular cooperation in the United Nations system (JIU/REP/2011/3), in which it was highlighted that there could be a greater role for the regional commissions in promoting South-South cooperation. In that report, the Joint Inspection Unit recommended that the Economic and Social Council request the regional commissions to set up strategies, structures and mechanisms and mobilize or reallocate resources at the legislative, programmatic and operational levels dedicated to enhancing subregional, regional and interregional South-South cooperation, and to use the annual

[27] Which brings together different actors, namely, providers of development cooperation, partners in South-South cooperation and international organizations, to share knowledge and implement projects that support the common goal of reducing poverty and promoting development (http://www.oecd.org/dac/dac-global-relations/triangular-cooperation.htm).

[28] See Nairobi outcome document of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, General Assembly resolution 64/222, para. 21(d); and South-South Cooperation, Assembly resolution 67/227, para. 4.

[29] See General Assembly resolution 68/230, para. 15, the report of the Second Committee of the General Assembly on operational activities for development: South-South cooperation for development, A/69/473/Add.2, para. 16.

[30] See General Assembly resolution 68/230, para. 19.

meetings of the Regional Coordination Mechanism as a tool for advancing system-wide cooperation and coordination in support of South-South cooperation. The framework of operational guidelines on United Nations support to South-South and triangular cooperation[31] issued by the Secretary-General in 2012 has been adopted by the High-Level Committee on South-South Cooperation and a United Nations Development Group task team on South-South and triangular cooperation was subsequently established in 2015 to use and build upon the guidelines.[32] The Inspectors draw the attention of the United Nations system, including the regional commissions, to the need to effectively implement the above-mentioned resolutions and recommendations.

B. Triennial and quadrennial comprehensive policy reviews of operational activities for development of the United Nations system[33]

34. Operational activities of the United Nations development system comprising more than 30 entities (funds, programmes, specialized agencies and entities of the United Nations Secretariat) are currently guided by General Assembly resolutions on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (before 2012 by the triennial comprehensive policy reviews). These resolutions provide guidance on funding of operational activities, the contribution of the United Nations system to national capacity development and development effectiveness, and the improved coherence, effectiveness and relevance of the system. In its resolution 62/208, the General Assembly requested the regional commissions to further develop their analytical capacities to support country-level development initiatives at the request of the programme countries, and to support measures for more intensive inter-agency collaboration at the regional and subregional levels.[34]

35. In its resolution 67/226, the General Assembly reaffirmed the increased importance of using the capacities of the regional commissions and the United Nation system regional teams for South-South cooperation. In a dedicated section on regional dimensions, the Assembly recognized the regional commissions' contribution to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. The Assembly requested the regional commissions, as well as other entities of the United Nations development system at the regional level "to further strengthen cooperation and coordination among themselves and with their respective headquarters".[35]

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[31] See SSC/17/3. The framework is a tool and reference manual on ways to mainstream South-South and triangular cooperation in the development planning and programming of United Nations Funds and Programmes, specialized agencies and regional commissions at the global, regional and country levels. It includes suggested sectoral cross-border thematic areas where the benefits of South-South interventions could be optimized.

[32] See Final Terms of Reference for the UNDG South-South and Triangular Cooperation Task Team, UNDG, 2015. Available from https://undg.org/main/undg_document/terms-of-reference-for-undg-south-south-and-triangular-cooperation-task-team.

[33] These evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the United Nations development system's support to national efforts of developing countries to pursue their priorities and meet their needs in the context of the United Nations development agenda that emerged from the Millennium Declaration and other global conferences and summits.

[34] See General Assembly resolution 62/208, para. 108.

[35] See General Assembly resolution 67/226, para. 146.

36. In its resolution 67/226, the General Assembly stressed the importance of the support of the regional structures to the United Nations country teams.[36] It asked United Nations system organizations, including the regional commissions, to intensify their cooperation in supporting the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, in close coordination with the resident coordinators and the country teams; to establish and/or improve mechanisms to promote knowledge-sharing; and for access to the technical capacities of the United Nations system at the regional and subregional levels.[37] It requested the regional commissions "to further develop their analytical capacities to support country-level development initiatives" and "to support measures for more intensive inter-agency cooperation at the regional and subregional levels", and encouraged "resident coordinators and country teams to draw more upon the normative support work and policy expertise that exists within the regional commissions".[38]

37. The 2013 and 2014 reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the resolutions on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review highlighted a number of concrete initiatives undertaken by the regional commissions, including closer linkages between the regional commissions and United Nations Development Group regional teams to develop joint strategic policy frameworks and collaborative analytical products to support United Nations country teams. Specific initiatives included: ECA working with partners on establishing coordination mechanisms in its five subregions;[39] the five regional commissions coming together in May 2013 to work collectively on identifying and fostering good practices in South-South cooperation;[40] and ESCAP convening a ministerial conference on regional integration in December 2013 to discuss how developing countries can best assist each other in their own development.[41] In that context, the Secretary-General noted that greater focus on interregional South-South cooperation would enable the regional commissions to more effectively address emerging challenges within and outside their regions.[42]

C. Support to the United Nations functional commissions and expert bodies

38. Since their establishment, the regional commissions have progressively been called upon to collaborate on supporting the work of a number of United Nations functional commissions, receiving specific mandates from the Economic and Social Council to follow up on the outcomes of major global conferences of these commissions and expert bodies.[43] Selected examples of the mandates and roles given to the regional commissions by at least eight Council's functional commissions and expert bodies can be found in annex II. These include:

(a) The Commission for Social Development;

(b) The Commission on the Status of Women;

(c) The Commission on Sustainable Development (replaced by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development);

[36] Ibid., para. 147.
[37] Ibid., para. 148.
[38] Ibid., para. 150.
[39] See E/2013/94, para. 157.
[40] Ibid., para. 2.
[41] See A/69/63-E/2014/10, para. 89.
[42] Ibid., para. 90.
[43] See www.un.org/esa/commissions.html.

(d) The Commission on Population and Development;

(e) The Statistical Commission;

(f) The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice;

(g) The Commission on Science and Technology for Development;

(h) The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

39. The range of roles given to the regional commissions confirms that the functional commissions and expert bodies regard them to be relevant actors in the implementation of their mandates. Since the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is the department primarily mandated to support the Economic and Social Council and its functional commissions and expert bodies, assessment of cooperation with the Department, explored in chapter V of the present report, is key to understanding the extent to which the regional commissions cooperate to fulfil their mandates related to the functional commissions and expert bodies.

D. The post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals[44]

40. The regional commissions have supported preparations for the post-2015 development agenda since the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals requested the Secretary-General to initiate thinking on such an agenda. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development additionally proposed the preparation of a set of sustainable development goals.[45] A role for the regional commissions was clearly highlighted in the Outcome Document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development,[46] in which the Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives stated that the "regional commissions and their subregional offices, have a significant role to play in promoting a balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in their respective regions."[47]

41. The Outcome Document underscored the "need to facilitate institutional coherence and harmonization of relevant development policies, plans and programmes" and encouraged "coordinated regional actions".[48] It recognized the "need to ensure effective linkage among global, regional, subregional and national processes to advance sustainable development" and urged the regional commissions to "prioritize sustainable development through, inter alia, more efficient and effective capacity-building, development and implementation of regional agreements and arrangements as appropriate, and exchange of information, best practices, and lessons learned". It also encouraged the "enhancement of the United Nations regional commissions and their subregional offices in their respective capacities to support Member States in implementing sustainable development".[49]

[44] Expected to be adopted through a dedicated United Nations summit in September 2015, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 69/244.

[45] The two processes have since been combined to arrive at one global development agenda for the post-2015 period, with sustainable development at its centre. See www.un.org/en/ecosoc/about/mdg.shtml.

[46] General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex.

[47] Ibid., para. 100.

[48] Ibid., paras. 100 and 185.

[49] Ibid., para. 100.

42. In his 2013 report on the contributions of the Economic and Social Council to the post-2015 agenda (E/2013/72), the Secretary-General further recognized that the regional commissions "play a critical intermediary role in bringing together national policymakers from the same region to compare development experiences. They can also advise on relevant policy and financing modalities to achieve progress at the national level towards the post-2015 development goals". He called for strengthening the role of the regional commissions "as institutional conduits between the global, regional and national levels" that "can also help identify practical modalities for the balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions into a robust post-2015 development agenda that takes into consideration the regional dimension". A prominent role for the regional commissions in the post-2015 development agenda was also called for in the 2013 report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda[50] and by the General Assembly in its resolution 67/290 on the format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on Sustainable Development.

43. In response to these reports and resolutions, the regional commissions convened regional and subregional consultations with Governments and various development actors to articulate regional perspectives on the post-2015 agenda and the sustainable development goals to inform the deliberations of the High-level Panel and the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. In their 2013 report entitled "A Regional Perspective on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda",[51] the five commissions identified priority areas for a global development agenda from a regional perspective and highlighted the need to adapt global goals to regional and national ones. Its key message was that, while there are many commonalities across the regions, their differing circumstances call for a nuanced approach and space for regional and subregional target-setting.

44. At the request of the Secretary-General, regional consultations were convened in August and September 2014 on an accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda that was "fit for purpose" and focused on the sharing of best practices from existing regional accountability mechanisms and how they can be integrated and adapted into a new/revised regional accountability framework and the features necessary for such a mechanism.[52]

45. **The Inspectors conclude that, as the above-mentioned reports, resolutions and initiatives indicate, the regional commissions can serve as a useful bridge between processes at the global, regional, subregional and national levels in**

[50] See www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP_P2015_Report.pdf.

[51] E/ESCWA/OES/2013/2, available from www.regionalcommissions.org/post2015regionalreport.pdf.

[52] Some key messages emanating from the regional consultations provide that the monitoring and accountability framework should be an integral part of the post-2015 development agenda, with accountability at different levels clearly distinguished, and that the national level should serve as the backbone of the accountability framework, with review tools and mechanisms for accountability being State-led and based on official statistics. Similarly, national capacity for implementation, monitoring and evaluation, with the engagement of civil society and the private sector, should to be strengthened and, as the sustainable development goals are not legally binding commitments, they should be of a positive, inspirational and aspirational nature. National ownership and the creation and promotion of a collaborative environment towards the achievement and implementation of the goals are critical to their success and, while building on existing mechanisms and successful experiences, a regional monitoring and accountability framework can encourage countries to share information, knowledge and experiences, strengthen capabilities and define coherent regional policies and approaches. See "Towards an effective monitoring and accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda perspectives from the regions", available from www.regionalcommissions.org/accountsynth.pdf.

implementing the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals. The Inspectors are of the view that the forthcoming resolution on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review should also provide a clear orientation for the regional commissions with regard to their expected role in the implementation of the post-2015 agenda and the goals. Any accountability framework developed in the context of the agenda should clearly delineate the regional dimension.

IV. Cooperation among the regional commissions

A. Main incentives and tools for cooperation

Development Account and Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation

46. Access to additional resources, in particular through the Development Account[53] and Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation,[54] has been one of the most important incentives and tools for cooperation among the regional commissions. It provides dedicated resources for development projects with defined frameworks, outcomes and timelines.

47. The push for a regional and subregional focus is clearly stated in the budget fascicle of the Development Account.[55] The guiding criteria for the selection of projects, as specified in the 2004 report of the Secretary-General on the review of the regular programme of technical cooperation and the Development Account (A/59/397), include promoting economic and technical cooperation among developing countries at the regional or interregional levels, having multiple United Nations entities on a project and multiplier effects.[56] In a subsequent report,[57] the Secretary-General further reiterated that "regional and interregional joint activities are encouraged". Several interviewees from the regional commissions and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs added that project proposals were more likely to be approved if they involved cooperation with one or more regional commissions. By October 2014, of the 119 active Development Account projects, 77 (65 per cent) involved the regional commissions and 53 (45 per cent) had one of the regional commissions as the lead implementing agency.

48. In his most recent biennial progress report (A/68/92), the Secretary-General mentioned that independent evaluations of Development Account projects showed that they encouraged cooperation both among United Nations entities and between the United Nations and national stakeholders. In a number of cases, Development Account projects led to demand for follow-up assistance from Member States. Earlier progress reports also had underscored the importance of the Development Account in

[53] The document outlining the governance and management structure of the Development Account can be found in the supplementary paper to the present report (JIU/REP/2015/3_Supplementary_Paper).

[54] The Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation is a separate section of the United Nations regular budget that provides dedicated focus and capacity for the United Nations Secretariat to contribute to the development of developing countries and countries with economies in transition through provision of technical assistance.

[55] See proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 (A/58/6 (Sect.35)).

[56] Remaining criteria are: (a) aim at building national capacities; (b) utilize the technical, human and other resources available in developing countries; (c) result in durable, self-sustaining initiatives; and (d) be in line with the selected theme for the biennium.

[57] Development Account, Report of the Secretary-General, A/62/466, para. 5.

"building cooperative working relationships with other United Nations entities"[58] and in "enabling joint work among United Nations Secretariat and other United Nations and non-United Nations partner entities, particularly at the regional and subregional levels, emphasizing national ownership and South-South cooperation".[59]

49. In a 2007 review of the Development Account, implementing agencies underscored, inter alia, the Account's importance as a tool to strengthen regional and subregional cooperation.[60] In their Guidelines for Joint Development Account Projects,[61] the regional commissions list several advantages of cooperation through the Development Account. These include the pooling of resources, coordination of initiatives, dissemination of lessons learned and increased impact and sustainability of projects. In addition, through Development Account projects, the regional commissions have embraced the spirit of working more closely together.

50. However, the Guidelines also mention that varying priorities of the regional commissions could lead to compromises, particularly in terms of resource use and themes addressed. In some cases, this diluted the focus and diminished the impact of the project. The Guidelines stated that the effectiveness of partnerships depended on the extent to which common or interregional priorities of partners are identified, on the basis of concrete situation analyses of the respective regions, and recommended that joint discussions between regional commissions prior to the preparation of a new Development Account cycle be held systematically to review and update the criteria guiding project formulation.

51. Furthermore, despite positive remarks overall, Member States expressed concern over the low implementation rate of Development Account projects.[62] Interviews with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the regional commissions highlighted that there was room for further improvement in showcasing the results from Development Account projects.

52. One way of improving the effectiveness of the Development Account is to strengthen the identification and selection process for project proposals. As described in the Guidelines for Joint Development Account Projects, the Regional Commissions New York Office at present assumes the responsibility for coordinating the submission of the project proposals of the regional commissions to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs with a view to avoid duplication, identifying synergies and common areas for joint projects. It also represents the regional commissions in the Steering Committee, which selects projects for funding from the Development Account.

53. Recently, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the regional commissions have agreed to a new Development Account governance architecture. The Department has suggested that a small review committee consisting of technical regional commission staff would be better placed to select project proposals for submission to the Steering Committee, a practice that worked well in the past and would improve the outcomes and speed of the process.

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[58] See A/62/466, para. 22.

[59] See seventh progress report of the Secretary-General on implementation of projects financed from the Development Account, , A/66/84, para. 2.

[60] See A/62/466, para. 22.

[61] Available from www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/operact/Technical_Cooperation/Consolidated%20revisions_19feb09%20DA.pdf.

[62] See General Assembly resolution 56/237.

54. Interventions funded by the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation are usually quick responses to developing country requests for advisory or training assistance in substantive areas. These include sectorial as well as regional and subregional advisory services covering the regional commissions. Overall, the resources of the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation are primarily used for contracting advisers who are specialists in technical cooperation and have substantive knowledge of subprogrammes.[63]

55. **The Inspectors conclude that both the Development Account and Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation have been drivers for enhancing cooperation among the regional commissions. They provide the necessary flexible resources and incentives for cooperation. With regard to the Development Account, there is scope to improve the regional commissions' selection process to strengthen its speed and outcome.**

Overlapping membership

56. Overlapping membership was another major incentive for bilateral cooperation between some regional commissions, as identified through interviews with staff of the regional commissions. ECE and ESCAP have 14 common members, ECE and ECLAC have 9, ESCAP and ECLAC have 6, and ECA and ESCWA have 5. These common members are detailed in table 7 below.

Table 7: Overlapping membership among the regional commissions

Regional commissions	Common members
ECE/ESCAP	Armenia, Azerbaijan, France, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Netherlands, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America and Uzbekistan
ECE/ECLAC	Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom and United States
ESCAP/ECLAC	France, Japan, Netherlands, Republic of Korea, United Kingdom and United States
ECA/ESCWA	Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia

Source: websites of five United Nations regional commissions.

57. Overlapping membership increases the number of joint initiatives among regional commissions. With the highest number of common members, ECE and ESCAP were involved in the largest number of joint initiatives undertaken during the biennium 2012-2013. They jointly implement the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia. This programme was launched in 1998 by its participating countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, later joined by Afghanistan and Azerbaijan) to further subregional integration among themselves and their integration into the global economy. While the staff of ECE and ESCAP highlighted the Special Programme as a good example of bilateral cooperation, some noted in interviews that at times there had been challenges in cooperation, given the different priorities of the two regional commissions.

[63] See report of the Secretary-General on the review of the regular programme of technical cooperation and the Development Account, A/59/397, paras. 12, 13 and 74.

Other perceived benefits from cooperation

58. Examples were provided by the regional commissions through the questionnaire responses and interviews of how cooperation among them had led to greater efficiency, programmatic coherence and impact. The joint project entitled "Strengthening national capacities to deal with international migration: maximizing development benefits and minimizing negative impact",[64] which ran from 2008 to 2011, involved all the regional commissions as implementing entities. The project allowed for significant synergies between the regional commissions relevant to the priorities of the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the regional commissions on the production of migration data.

59. The regional commissions hold the view that, through cooperation, they are able to leverage resources, share experiences and lessons learned, build on each other's work and comparative advantages, generate synergies and multiplier effects and tackle common problems. Cooperation allows the regional commissions to present their perspectives on global issues and to ensure the integration of the regional dimension in global development policy discussions.

60. The move towards greater cooperation was attributed to more recognition by the regional commissions of their common values, objectives and challenges. Furthermore, advances in technology have facilitated their regular communication. The regional commissions reported wider realization among them that, as a coordinated group, they can have greater impact and a more prominent role in driving changes both in regional and global processes, as well as within the United Nations Organization.

61. High-level officials of the regional commissions stressed that, in times of resource constraints, it was even more important to cooperate and avoid duplication. For example, the methodology to measure the cost of hunger; the methodology to measure and assess the damage, loss and needs after natural disasters; and the census and demographic data microprocessing software entitled Retrieval of Data for Small Areas by Microcomputer have all been developed by ECLAC but also implemented by other regional commissions in their regions.

62. The regional commissions also perceive benefits in joining forces to tackle common management and administrative challenges, including reporting and budgetary matters, dealing with requests for additional resources and the establishment of a special review board dedicated to filling posts of the regional commissions and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

63. However, staff of the regional commissions stressed that the resources dedicated to cooperation are limited, since the priority of the commissions lay in serving the regional member countries and addressing their needs. In addition, the different political and operational environments in which they functioned often required different approaches. Nonetheless, they agreed that cooperation was undoubtedly necessary and should be pursued, whenever justified and feasible.

64. **The Inspectors conclude that, while cooperation requires financial and human resources and involves costs, it can provide clear and tangible benefits to the regional commissions. For these benefits to outweigh the costs, the level and type of cooperation pursued have to follow a careful and systematic assessment.**

[64] See www.un.org/esa/devaccount/projects/2008/0809A.html.

B. Levels and types of cooperation

65. All of the regional commissions expressed the view that the level of cooperation among them had improved in the past few years.[65] Mechanisms for cooperation have reportedly been strengthened, including the meetings of the executive secretaries and the Chiefs of Programme Planning of Regional Commissions. Some substantive divisions noted greater interaction with their counterparts in other regional commissions, for example, in the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and post-2015 development agenda.

66. Table 8 gives the number of joint initiatives between the regional commissions during the biennium 2012-2013. As reported through the questionnaires and Development Account project database, the regional commissions took part in a total of 131 joint initiatives over the biennium. More than half of these involved ESCAP and a third of all joint initiatives involved ESCAP working with ECE. At the other end of the scale, only two joint initiatives took place between ECLAC and ESCWA, suggesting that their geographical distances and different challenges limited the incentives for cooperation.

Table 8: Number of joint initiatives among the regional commissions during the biennium 2012-2013

	Number of joint initiatives among the regional commissions during the biennium 2012-2013			
	ECA	ECE	ECLAC	ESCAP
ECA				
ECE	14			
ECLAC	5	12		
ESCAP	15	41	15	
ESCWA	7	10	2	15

Source: Joint Inspection Unit questionnaire responses and Development Account project database.

67. According to these figures, cooperation among the regional commissions accounted for about 40 per cent of total cooperation with all partners during the biennium 2012-2013.[66] The majority (over 70 per cent) of these joint initiatives were through the Development Account. The most popular areas for cooperation among the regional commissions during the biennium 2012-2013 were sustainable development, social development, environment and natural resources, macroeconomics and finance, statistics, governance and institution-building, and transport and trade facilitation. Other areas identified where cooperation could be beneficial included refugees and internally displaced persons, migration, food security and rural development, growth with quality, illicit flows and disaster risk reduction.

[65] In a March 2014 meeting, the Executive Secretaries of Regional Commissions took note of a decision by the 11th Meeting of Chiefs of Programme Planning (16-17 March 2014) to introduce four criteria for the selection of Interregional Policy Cooperation areas: (a) be demand-driven from regions; (b) be transformative with a multiplier effect; (c) contribute to balanced sustainable development and post-2015 priorities in the regions; and (d) leverage value added through best collective expertise of regional commissions.

[66] Total cooperation comprises all joint initiatives undertaken during 2012-2013 with other regional commissions, other United Nation entities and the Regional Commissions New York Office, as reported in the Joint Inspection Unit questionnaire.

C. Mechanisms for cooperation

68. Through the responses to the questionnaire, mechanisms for cooperation among the regional commissions were rated as "effective" overall by four regional commissions and "neither effective nor ineffective" by one.[67] One frequent suggestion made in interviews with the regional commissions for improving the effectiveness of cooperation among them was to be more "strategic" in the use of these mechanisms. The main mechanisms for cooperation among the regional commissions and related issues identified during the course of the review are detailed below.

Meetings of the Executive Secretaries

69. Meetings of the executive secretaries of the regional commissions are held on average three times a year. The meetings were established in 1962, following General Assembly resolutions 1518 (XV) of 1960,[68] 1709 (XVI) of 1961[69] and 1823 (XVII) of 1962.[70] There are different types of meetings of the executive secretaries. The annual meetings are hosted by the Coordinator. Other meetings are held on the sidelines of the Second Committee of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. Ad hoc meetings are held on the margins of thematic and other summits and conferences and through videoconferencing. The primary focus of this review is on the first category, although many of the observations would also be pertinent to other types of meetings.

70. Table 9 below provides an assessment of the content of the meetings of the executive secretaries that have taken place during the past five years (2010-2014), on the basis of an analysis of the records of these meetings. Overall, the meetings of the executive secretaries were assessed by officials of the regional commissions as providing an important forum for discussions. The meetings most often addressed support and follow up to major global conferences as well as substantive areas for cooperation among the regional commissions, the positioning of regional commissions within the United Nations system and cooperation with other United Nations departments or organizations, such as the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNDP.

[67] Assessment based on a close-ended question with the following response categories: "effective", "neither effective nor ineffective" and "ineffective".

[68] The resolution urged the regional commissions "to strengthen cooperation among themselves and among their executive secretaries, including the exchange of the results of work and experiences gained on problems of common interest".

[69] The resolution requested the regional commissions to "further develop close cooperation among themselves in their substantive and operational activities and to report on the progress made in their annual reports to the Economic and Social Council".

[70] The resolution recommended that "the Secretary-General continue to convene meetings of the executive secretaries of the regional economic commissions to discuss matters of common interest and to exchange experience".

Table 9: Analysis of the topics of the executive secretaries meetings (2010-2014)[71]

Percentage of agenda items addressing:	
Support/follow-up to major global conferences	28
Substantive areas for cooperation among the regional commissions	21
Positioning of regional commissions within the United Nations system	13
Cooperation with other United Nations system entities	12
Regional frameworks and processes	3
Programme budget	4
Other administrative and management issues	19

71. A number of interviewees from the regional commissions noted that the meetings of the executive secretaries were usually more focused on headquarters-driven agenda, including budgetary and administrative issues. Though some executive secretaries felt that administrative matters should be initially addressed by the Chiefs of Programme Planning, most stressed that certain budgetary or administrative matters had to be addressed at their level, including challenges in recruitment and procurement, administering overheads for common support services, or performing their role as the designated officials for the United Nations security for the specific country in which the regional commission is located. In some instances, discussions have been more ad hoc rather than focused on identified thematic areas and priorities. No established practice of a systematic analysis of the results and outcomes of cooperation among the regional commissions, either in substantive areas or specific projects, was discerned by the Inspectors.

72. It was not always clear how and when the agenda of the meetings was prepared. The offices of the executive secretaries reported that the Regional Commissions New York Office usually prepares the agenda and sends it to them for comments. They noted that the agenda was often circulated with insufficient time before each meeting for effective consultation and preparation. The Office, on the other hand, noted that, while it regularly sought suggestions for agenda items, inputs were rarely received. The Inspectors found no formal framework for the preparation of the meetings of the executive secretaries, outlining the roles and responsibilities of various actors and operational modalities. There is a need for the meetings to become more outcome-driven and to be better planned and organized to ensure consistency and continuity. Several executive secretaries added that, while meeting in person every year was important, they could hold videoconferences more often, which would be more cost-effective.

73. All regional commissions recognized that follow-up on action points from the meetings was not sufficiently systematic. According to the records, responsibilities for follow-up actions were mostly assigned to the executive secretaries, the Regional Commissions New York Office or a specific regional commission. However, it was not clear who was responsible overall for monitoring and ensuring follow up and holding assignees accountable for implementing the action points. Views on who should be responsible for this were divided.

74. The Inspectors conclude that, for the meetings of the executive secretaries to be more effective, substantive improvements are necessary. The meetings should be

[71] Source: Meetings of the Executive Secretaries held on: 25 January 2010; 2 July 2010; 3 November 2010; 13 and 14 January 2011; 17 February 2011; 6 and 8 July 2011; 17 January 2012; 9 July 2012; 5 November 2012; 28 April and 1 May 2013; 4 July 2013; 31 October 2013; 17 and 18 March 2014; 3 July 2014; and 24 September 2014.

planned on a predictable basis, making use of the presence of executive secretaries for the sessions of the Economic and Social Council, the Second Committee of the General Assembly and other major events, as well as through videoconferencing. The strategic orientation of the meetings and establishment of annual thematic priorities should be more clearly based on the priorities and concerns of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and other relevant coordination mechanisms.

75. The agendas have to be prepared carefully, with possible themes, annotations and notes conveyed well in advance of the meeting. The roles and modalities for implementation and monitoring of decisions made at the meetings have to be clearly defined. The Chiefs of Programme Planning should be tasked with the overall monitoring of follow-up on meeting decisions. The Inspectors believe that the adoption of the following recommendation will lead to enhanced effectiveness of the cooperation among the regional commissions.

Recommendation 1
The executive secretaries of the regional commissions should develop and approve, by 2016, a formal modus operandi for the effective conduct of their regular meetings, including preparation of meeting agenda, formulation of objectives, follow-up and monitoring of implementation of the decisions, by assigning corresponding responsibilities to the Chiefs of Programme Planning and the Regional Commissions New York Office.

Coordinator of the Regional Commissions

76. The Coordinator of the regional commissions is the executive secretary, who is chosen by his/her peers to ensure the interface between all the regional commissions and represent them at high-level meetings at the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, and at CEB, United Nations Management Committee and other high-level decision-making bodies. There is no official description of the role and responsibilities of the Coordinator. This function was established in the mid-1980s with a view to reinforcing the regional dimension of key issues dealt with by the United Nations.[72] It was also meant to foster cooperation and synergies among the regional commissions, to further work on issues of common interest and to conduct joint initiatives.[73]

77. Traditionally, the Coordinator rotates every year. Some executive secretaries thought that the term should be extended to two years, in line with biennial cycles, to give the Coordinator time to implement joint decisions and have a positive impact. The priorities of the Coordinator would then fluctuate according to the priorities of a particular biennium. Other executive secretaries thought that the term should be reduced so that all executive secretaries assume the role within a period of three years and are exposed to the work of other regional commissions and incentivized to cooperate where beneficial.

78. There are generally no resources set aside for the Coordinator. Senior management of the regional commissions noted that the level of activities by the Coordinator depended on the amount of resources that he or she was able to allocate to the role. Often, it was not prioritized or given sufficient attention. The Inspectors

[72] There is no evidence of formal establishment in the Economic and Social Council or General Assembly resolutions.
[73] See www.unece.org/press/pr2009/09oes_p05e.html.

conclude that, for this mechanism to be more effective, coordinating activities, outputs and outcomes need to be integrated within those of the regional commissions and given due attention in performance appraisals and work plans. Additionally, the strategic direction, as well as priorities for the joint work of the regional commissions, should be set and agreed upon by the executive secretaries prior to the Coordinator's term.

79. The Inspectors believe that the adoption of the following recommendation will enhance the effectiveness of the role of the Coordinator of the Regional Commissions.

Recommendation 2
The executive secretaries of the regional commissions should develop and adopt, by 2016, specific terms of reference for the Coordinator of the Regional Commissions that detail his/her roles and responsibilities, including term limit and the modalities for coordination, consultation, decision-making, representation and handover from the incumbent Coordinator to the next.

Meetings of Chiefs of Programme Planning

80. The annual Meeting of Chiefs of Programme Planning is a structured meeting convened by the Coordinator of the Regional Commissions. The Chiefs of Programme Planning also reported meeting on an ad hoc basis on the margins of global events or meetings of other bodies, such as the Committee for Programme and Coordination or the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, and through videoconferences on a monthly basis. The chair of the Meetings of Chiefs of Programme Planning sets the agenda and prepares the summary records. The Regional Commissions New York Office participates in the meetings.

81. The report team analysed the summary records of the Meeting of Chiefs of Programme Planning held in March 2014, May 2013, April 2013, November 2012 and January 2012. The main items discussed at those meetings were: proposals for Development Account projects and cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs; tools and templates to be developed by the Monitoring and Evaluation Network of the regional commission; the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and post-2015 development agenda processes; the programme budget and strategic framework; joint publications; the implications of the 2012 resolution on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review; and the need for harmonized positions by the regional commissions. The summary records usually specified action points and responsibilities for follow-up, but did not always give timelines for implementation. Overall, there was consensus among participants that the Meetings of Chiefs of Programme Planning provide a useful vehicle for joint review and planning, discussion of shared priorities and issues and exchanges of lessons learned and good practices.

82. **The Inspectors believe that the executive secretaries should make more effective use of Meetings of Chiefs of Programme Planning. In this regard, they recommend that the Chiefs of Programme Planning be tasked with performing the lead role, with support from the Regional Commissions New York Office, in preparing the agenda of the meetings of the executive secretaries and ensuring follow-up to and implementation of the decisions and action points adopted by them.**

Joint publications and projects

83. The regional commissions have produced at least one joint publication a year, with one regional commission usually taking the lead in coordinating inputs. In 2008, a study on the financial crisis was issued, followed in 2012 by a study on the regional dimension of development and the United Nations system. In 2013, the above-mentioned joint report entitled "A Regional Perspective on the Post-2015 Development Agenda" was published, highlighting the need to adapt global goals to regional and national ones with due respect to regional specificities. Led by ESCWA, this was considered by the regional commissions to be a good example of cross-cutting analysis, drawing out key messages from a regional perspective for the preparation of the post-2015 development agenda. Furthermore, in October 2014, the Regional Commissions New York Office prepared a synthesis report entitled "Towards an effective monitoring and accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda: perspectives from the regions". The report highlighted the main reflections and messages following regional consultations to solicit Member States' views on accountability for the post-2015 development agenda and to explore options for an accountability framework for it.

84. However, the impact of these joint publications is widely debated, including by the regional commissions themselves. Some viewed them as a compilation of work done by different regional commissions rather than a cross-cutting, interregional analysis. Even when the publications contained interesting and useful information, their dissemination and outreach remained limited. The problem with dissemination of publications was highlighted in recent OIOS evaluations of ECA and ESCAP.[74] It was recommended that both regional commissions better communicate and disseminate their research and analytical work, develop outreach tools and establish mechanisms to track the publications' reach and use.

85. With inputs from the regional commissions, the Regional Commissions New York Office prepares the annual report of the Secretary-General on regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields,[75] submitted to the Economic and Social Council and containing a summary of cooperation among the regional commissions, including interregional cooperation activities, lessons learned and the main messages, priorities, agreements and outputs of conferences. The 2004 OIOS report to the General Assembly on audits of the regional commissions (A/58/785) recommended that the annual report be restructured and made more succinct to facilitate the discussions in the Council. However, a review of the most recent five reports shows that they usually fall short in drawing conclusions or providing recommendations. They also do not contain any evaluation of the effectiveness or impact of initiatives undertaken, except in instances where they are discussed in meetings or conferences detailed in the report. **The Inspectors are of the view that the annual report of the Secretary-General could become more substantive and analytical, to be used as an input of the regional commissions to the global review of the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda by the Economic and Social Council.**

[74] See IED-14-008 and IED-14-002.
[75] See www.regionalcommissions.org/?p=239.

86. Other joint initiatives by the regional commissions include projects, events and seminars and joint statements.[76]

Mechanisms for information-sharing

87. Information-sharing among the regional commissions, other than through the mechanisms identified above, was more ad hoc. In some thematic areas, such as social development, trade facilitation and sustainable energy, there were focal points across the regional commissions who shared information and communicated regularly. However, momentum for this type of cooperation often depended on the interest of senior management and/or informal personal relationships. There was no central database of contacts by thematic area for each regional commission or common platform to which interested parties could easily gain access. All regional commissions were of the view that this type of database or platform was important and would improve cooperation. However, there were reservations from some interviewees about how resource-intensive such a database or platform would be to regularly maintain. Some regional commissions also identified language as a challenge in sharing information as the documents they produced were sometimes available only in Spanish or Arabic.

88. The Inspectors are of the view that cooperation among regional commissions can be enhanced in a more effective and systematic way through the use of a common online platform along the lines of UN-Energy, which was reported to promote coherence within the United Nations system in the energy field and to increase collective engagement between the United Nations and key external stakeholders.[77]

89. This issue has been on the agenda of the regional commissions. At the July 2010 meeting of the executive secretaries, the Regional Commissions New York Office proposed the creation of a customized online platform, to be maintained by the Office which would enable the regional commissions to group together in forums on the basis of areas of work and shared interests, for example, the Chiefs of Programme Planning, transport and energy. The proposal was endorsed by the executive secretaries in 2011. However, little progress has been made since.

90. An informal suggestion from one of the regional commissions for the present review was to create an online platform that would not only allow for more regular substantive interaction between the regional commissions, but also provide a vehicle for their collective voice. Such an online platform could serve as a common tool to showcase and project the substantive achievements of the five regional commissions, including flagship projects and publications. It would make available the work of all regional commissions in one place, thereby facilitating access for Member States' delegates and different United Nations entities. In addition to serving as a platform for knowledge-building and knowledge-sharing, it would also serve as an advocacy tool, enhancing the profile and visibility of the regional dimension of the United Nations

[76] In 2010, the regional commissions agreed on a joint approach to trade facilitation. This allowed them to present a common view on key trade facilitation issues at the regional and interregional levels, in relation to capacity-building needs and approaches. In 2013, the regional commissions jointly convened a series of high-level events on the challenges faced by countries in political transition. This was geared towards supporting ESCWA member countries which were going through transition. A joint side-event was also organized at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to share experiences in crisis management and transition to democracy. In November 2014, the executive secretaries of the regional commissions issued a joint statement calling on their respective member States to spur a faster transition to sustainable energy.

[77] See www.un-energy.org.

system's activities. The platform may eventually constitute an important component of a comprehensive outreach strategy put in place by the regional commissions.

91. The Inspectors find this initiative to be useful and believe that the adoption of the following recommendation will enhance coordination and cooperation among the regional commissions and further the dissemination of best practices.

Recommendation 3
The executive secretaries of the regional commissions should explore the possibility of establishing a common online platform for knowledge-management, more systematic exchanges of lessons learned and good practices as well as an advocacy tool, in order to increase the profile and visibility of their activities and promote their products at the global level.

D. The role of the Regional Commissions New York Office

92. Cooperation with the Regional Commissions New York Office accounted for five per cent of total cooperation by the regional commissions during the biennium 2012-2013, as reported through the Joint Inspection Unit questionnaire.[78] It mainly involved awareness-raising and promotion of the work done by the regional commissions, liaison with Headquarters departments, development of common approaches for intergovernmental meetings and other global events (including on the post-2015 development agenda and issues of sustainable development, social development, gender and statistics), proposed programme budgets, the report of the Secretary-General on regional cooperation, and coordination of proposals to be presented to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs for the Development Account.

93. The regional commissions were generally positive about the role of the Regional Commissions New York Office to cover various policy deliberations and to represent them in New York. In response to questions on the frequency to which benefits from cooperation with the Office were realized, four regional commissions noted that joint initiatives "usually" resulted in expected short- and medium-term benefits, and one responded "sometimes". Three regional commissions judged that joint initiatives with the Office "usually" facilitated the fulfilment of their organization's longer-term mandates and objectives; one responded that they "sometimes" did; and one noted that they "rarely" did.[79] Concrete examples of support by the Office were provided by the regional commissions. The coordination of the Office for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in particular was highlighted as a success. The executive secretaries were appreciative of the logistical support extended by the Office during their missions to New York.

94. However, interviewees from the regional commissions expressed uncertainty over whether the information provided to them by the Regional Commissions New York Office was always timely and comprehensive. The regional commissions

[78] Comprises all joint initiatives undertaken during 2012-2013 with other regional commissions, other United Nation entities and the Regional Commissions New York Office, as reported in the Joint Inspection Unit questionnaire.

[79] Assessment based on close-ended questions with the following response categories: "usually", "sometimes", "rarely" and "never".

indicated that the Office should concentrate on critical areas and make a concerted effort to respond promptly to requests from the commissions.

95. It was also suggested that rather than seeking additional resources, the Regional Commissions New York Office should aim to utilize its present resources in a more efficient manner. However, if and when additional resources are deemed necessary, one of the options could be the possible secondment of staff members to the Office, on a short-term basis, preferably from the regional commission whose executive secretary is acting as the Coordinator.

96. Another challenge identified by the regional commissions was the way in which the functions of the Regional Commissions New York Office were set. The Inspectors found that there was no clear understanding by the regional commissions of the accountability of the Office. Regional commissions highlighted the need to clarify the level of ownership they had over the Office.

97. The Inspectors recall that the issues of unclear reporting lines and accountability had been identified earlier, in the 2007 Joint Inspection Unit report JIU/REP/2007/10, on liaison offices in the United Nations system, which highlighted that, in representing the regional commissions in committees at the United Nations Headquarters, the Regional Commissions New York Office often had to take decisions with no time to revert back and consult with the regional commissions.

98. To address leadership and accountability issues, the Inspectors find merit in the arrangement that the Director of the Regional Commissions New York Office reports formally to the Coordinator of the regional commissions. Moreover, they agree that the executive secretaries need to jointly decide on the priorities, functions, reporting lines, etc. of the Office and approve the detailed annual workplan of the Office. They believe that the implementation of the following recommendation will lead to enhanced efficiency and accountability in the work of the Office which, in turn, should lead to enhanced effectiveness and cooperation between the Office and the regional commissions.

Recommendation 4
The executive secretaries of the regional commissions should adopt, by 2016, specific terms of reference that clearly define the functions, responsibilities, resources and accountability of the Regional Commissions New York Office, and adapt the job description of the Director and the staff of the Office, as needed.

V. Cooperation between the regional commissions and other United Nations entities

99. The regional commissions are unanimous about the importance of cooperation with other United Nations entities, which constituted part of the core strategic, planning, programmatic and reporting documents of the regional commissions.[80] It ensures an inclusive, coherent and complementary approach to addressing current and emerging priorities of the regions, avoids the duplication of efforts and built on the

[80] Examples include the ESCAP strategic framework for the biennium 2014-2015 and the ESCWA partnership strategy. http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N13/236/18/PDF/N1323618.pdf?OpenElement.

strengths and comparative advantages of the regional commissions. Table 10 below presents responses of the regional commissions on the frequency with which benefits from cooperation with other United Nations entities were realized.

Table 10: Realization of benefits from cooperation with other United Nations entities

Responses of the regional commissions to questions on whether cooperation with the rest of the United Nations system				
	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	No opinion
Resulted in expected short- and medium-term benefits	ESCAP, ESCWA, ECA, ECE	ECLAC	-	-
Facilitated the fulfilment of their organization's mandates and objectives	ESCAP, ESCWA, ECLAC	ECA, ECE	-	-

Source: Responses to Joint Inspection Unit questionnaires provided by the regional commissions.

A. Level and type of cooperation between the regional commissions and other United Nations entities

100. Table 11 presents the joint initiatives between the regional commissions and their main United Nations system partners during the biennium 2012-2013, as reported through the questionnaire responses[81] and Development Account project database. Cooperation with other United Nations entities accounted for over 55 per cent of the total number of joint initiatives listed in the questionnaire responses, confirming that this type of cooperation is important to the regional commissions.

101. The main areas for cooperation with other United Nations system organizations were: the environment, sustainable development (including the post-2015 development agenda), statistics, social development, macroeconomic policies, agriculture, disaster preparedness and risk reduction, natural resources and energy, gender, migration, population, governance, science, technology and trade.

102. Cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs was the highest. The latter was involved in various capacities in at least a quarter of the joint initiatives reported. Many of these initiatives involved the Department and all five regional commissions. UNCTAD, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and UNDP were other significant partners and also cooperated in several instances with all five regional commissions. The distribution of joint initiatives with other United Nations system entities was relatively evenly spread across the five regional commissions.

103. Cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNCTAD was mostly through the Development Account, although there was some bilateral cooperation. The main areas for cooperation with the Department and UNCTAD during the biennium 2012-2013 were statistics, trade, sustainable development, governance, transport, macroeconomic policy, social development and population.

[81] The regional commissions were asked to list all joint initiatives undertaken during the biennium 2012-2013 with other United Nations system organizations. The table does not cover all partner organizations listed, only the ones who cooperate the most with the regional commissions.

Table 11: Joint initiatives between the regional commissions and their main United Nations system partners during the biennium 2012-2013[82]

Number of joint initiatives during the biennium 2012-2013	Dept. of Eco. and Soc. Affairs	UNCTAD	UNEP	UNDP	FAO	UN Habitat	OHRLLS	ILO	UNIDO	WHO	UNICEF	Total
ECA	14	6	4	3	1	2	3	1	1	-	-	35
ECE	9	3	9	8	4	1	3	2	3	5	1	48
ECLAC	10	4	5	8	5	7	-	2	3	2	2	48
ESCAP	13	10	4	3	2	1	3	2	-	-	3	41
ESCWA	9	4	4	3	2	2	-	1	1	-	-	26

Source: Joint Inspection Unit questionnaire responses and Development Account project database.

B. Cooperation on normative and analytical functions

104. Cooperation on normative and analytical functions is the main type of cooperation between the regional commissions and other United Nation system entities. The regional commissions have the mandate to convene Member States in their respective regions; this allows them to play an important role in bringing together high-level officials and other regional actors for norm-setting, consensus-building and follow-up on major global initiatives, such as those emanating from the functional commissions, for example, the International Conference on Population and Development, the review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the post-2015 development agenda.

105. The depth of analysis and discussions at the regional level was reported by most stakeholders, including Member States, to be greater than at Headquarters, as Member States had the space to form a consolidated position before discussing the issues at the global level. The regional commissions also offered the space for a more thorough

[82] Examples of cooperation during the biennium 2012-2013 with other United Nations entities included:

- Cooperation between ECA and UNEP to develop a harmonized framework for the development of bioenergy in Africa to support African Union members
- The joint ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section, which is funded by both organizations and works to implement a joint, integrated programme of work that allows for an effective, coordinated and long-term response to emerging developments in the pan-European region, such as sustainable forest management, climate change, biodiversity conservation and sustainable use
- A joint programme of work (jointly funded) between ECLAC and UNFPA to enhance national and regional capacities for the production, analysis, utilization and dissemination of quality statistical data on population dynamics, youth and gender equality to inform decision-making and gender perspective
- Cooperation of ESCAP with ITU, UNCTAD and 10 other United Nations entities on the Partnership on Measuring Information and Communications Technology for Development (including work on measuring the World Summit on the Information Society targets, information and communications technology and gender)
- Cooperation on the report on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, between ESCWA, DPA, UNCTAD, UNRWA, OCHA, ILO, FAO, WHO, UNESCO, UNEP, UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNFPA and UN-Women.

interpretation of what the issues being brought up at headquarters meant for the region, including financing for development or governance of natural resources. They are also appreciated for their intersectoral approach and regular contact with a range of line ministries.

106. The "think tank" role of most regional commissions was noted to be a major strength. The regional commissions bring together information from diverse sources, including political trends among Member States. They also have the capacity to provide detailed research and analysis, and policy advice, on major economic and social issues in their regions. For example, ECLAC coordinated an inter-agency document entitled "Sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean: follow-up to the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015 and to Rio+20"[83] along with 20 organizations of the United Nations system. This was welcomed by Member States in the framework of the 2013 regional consultations in Bogota.

107. Some of the normative and analytical work of the regional commissions has been replicable in other regions. The norms and standards developed by ECE, for example, have been adopted at the global level and are open to accession by all countries, and were recognized by partner United Nations organizations to be of great value. Member States representatives interviewed from the region were appreciative of the work of ECE, particularly of the high level of quality of its legal instruments, guidelines, norms and standards.

C. Cooperation on operational activities at the country level

108. As described in the supplementary paper to the present report, an operational role was not initially envisaged for the regional commissions. However, in 1977, their functions were enlarged "to participate actively in operational activities carried out through the United Nations system, including the preparation of intercountry programmes, as may be required, in their respective regions".[84] However, it has been argued that the role of the regional commissions remained more of a facilitator for regional cooperation rather than a team leader.[85] The Inspectors agree with this observation. The 2012 resolution on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review asked United Nations organizations, including the regional commissions, to intensify their cooperation in supporting the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, in close coordination with the resident coordinators and the United Nations country teams; and to establish and/or improve mechanisms for cooperation.

109. This review encountered mixed views on the extent to which the regional commissions should be operational, and how closely they should work with the United Nations Development Group, especially at the country level. Some interviewees from the regional commissions and Group entities were in favour of a clear demarcation between normative and analytical functions, on one hand, and operational functions on the other. They stressed that the regional commissions, using their regional lens, should focus on capacity-building work that is derived from regional norms and policies. For example, they can assist countries in implementing regional legal instruments and agreements, and in tackling regional and transboundary

[83] Available from http://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/3184/S2013412_en.pdf?sequence=1.

[84] See General Assembly resolution 32/197, annex IV, para. 23.

[85] See Yves Berthelot, *Unity and Diversity in Development Ideas: Perspectives from the UN Regional Commissions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

issues. Group organizations, on the other hand, using their country level lens, should focus on operational activities and projects at the country level. At the regional level, they then provide a valuable summation of operational and humanitarian experiences from the country level.

110. The majority of interviewees from the regional commissions and United Nations Development Group entities, however, were of the view that the perspectives of the regional commissions would add value to the United Nations country teams and United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks[86] and would strengthen the link between the country and regional levels. In some regions, Group entities noted that the analytical capacity of the country teams would be enhanced if the regional commissions were active members of the teams.[87] They also pointed out that many funds and programmes, especially UNDP, had begun to play a role in normative and policy work on the basis of mandates from their executive boards.

111. There are divergent levels of engagement by different regional commissions with the United Nations country teams in the preparation and review of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks. ECE reviews and comments on the Frameworks within the region, and both ECE and the United Nations Development Group deemed this a useful practice. In the Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP collaborates with country teams in the planning and review of the Frameworks of least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. ESCWA receives Frameworks and common country assessments for review and regularly provides substantive comments to documents relating to Member States where it has a high level of engagement. ECE, ESCAP and ESCWA are active members of the respective regional United Nations Development Group Peer Support Groups. A few subregional office staff interviewed from ECA and ESCAP reported to have participated in the meetings of country teams and made contributions to the Frameworks. At the other end of the scale, ECLAC noted that to preserve its perceived impartiality its policy is not to join meetings of country teams in most member countries. However, this does not prevent the regional commission from working bilaterally with United Nations Development Group entities or commenting on the Frameworks when asked.

112. The Inspectors are of the view that any country-level capacity development work by the regional commissions should be included in the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks and that the commissions should be contributing to the Frameworks in a more systematic manner. Therefore, they **encourage the executive secretaries to ensure greater coherence with the United Nations country teams and United Nations Development Group regional teams by systematically reviewing and commenting on United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, providing their regional perspective and suggesting for inclusion in the Frameworks any capacity development work they are planning to undertake at the country level.**

[86] The United Nations Development Assistance Framework is the programme document between a Government and the United Nations country teams that describes the collective actions and strategies of the United Nations for the achievement of national development. The Framework includes outcomes, activities and each United Nations organization's responsibilities that are agreed to by the Government. The Framework typically runs for three to five years and includes reviews at different points in time.

[87] With regard to the member countries of the regional commissions, there are 44 United Nations country teams in the ECA region, 24 in the ECE region, 26 in the ECLAC region, 25 in the ESCAP region and 15 in the ESCWA region that the regional commissions could potentially cooperate with.

D. Regional Coordination Mechanism

113. The United Nations organization has been taking several initiatives to ensure coherence in the activities of the United Nations system at the regional level. In 1998, the report of the Secretary-General on the regional commissions in the context of a programme for reform of the United Nations stressed that "the United Nations must improve coordination of the activities of the regional commissions with other regional activities within the United Nations system" and that "the relationship between the regional commissions and the Organization's regional activities deserves especially close attention".[88] The report identified the main issue to "centre around the relation between the entities that profess to 'coordinate' and those that are supposed to be 'coordinated'".[89] The Secretary-General proposed "yearly meetings, to be convened in each geographical area, between the regional commissions and all the United Nations funds and programmes, agencies and departments in regional and intercountry activities. These meetings would be designed to effect the exchange of information and promote joint action in order to reinforce synergies and avoid overlapping ... Follow-up activities will be further pursued in the Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs and in the United Nations Development Group."[90]

114. Following the proposal of the Secretary-General, the Regional Coordination Mechanism was established through Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46, in which the Council recognized that "[t]he team leadership role of the regional commissions calls for their holding regular inter-agency meetings in each region with a view to improving coordination among the work programmes of the organizations of the United Nations system in that region".[91] They were meant to be "cost-effective, built up on already existing coordination mechanisms, and focused on specific issues requiring coordination at the regional level".[92] The Council further stipulated that the outcome of the meetings be reported to it through the respective intergovernmental bodies of the regional commissions.

115. The present review could not identify resolutions or decisions by legislative bodies on what the Regional Coordination Mechanism should cover vis-à-vis the United Nations Development Group regional teams, only a few encouragements from the General Assembly over time for the United Nations system organizations to coordinate through the Regional Coordination Mechanism. As a result, perception of overlap and duplication between the two has increased, especially after the Group moved in the area of "upstream policy work".

116. In 2008, a study by the regional commissions entitled "United Nations Coherence at the Regional Level: Synergies and Complementarities between the Regional Coordination Mechanism and Regional Directors' Team"[93] assessed the effectiveness of the Regional Coordination Mechanism and its relationship with other coordination mechanisms, such as the United Nations Development Group regional teams (known as the Regional Directors' Teams prior to 2010[94]). The study contained a number of recommendations aimed at improving coordination and enhancing

[88] See report of the Secretary-General on regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields, E/1998/65, para. 16.
[89] Ibid., para. 16.
[90] Ibid., para. 17.
[91] Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46, annex III.B., para 13.
[92] Ibid., para. 13.
[93] Available from www.regionalcommissions.org/rcm.pdf.
[94] See www.undg.org/content/regional_undg_teams.

synergies between the Regional Coordination Mechanisms and the regional teams (see annex IV). They included a focus by the Mechanism on the policy, normative support and analytical work at the regional and subregional levels, including through a thematic focus and linkage to, and integration into, country-level development work. The findings of the study were welcomed by the Joint Inspection unit, which, in turn, proposed a benchmark for the Mechanism and Teams to effectively promote coherence and integration at the regional, subregional and country level.[95]

117. The division of labour and complementarities between the roles and functions of the Regional Coordination Mechanism and United Nations Development Group regional teams were subsequently agreed upon between the Chair of the United Nations Development Group and the executive secretaries of the regional commissions and adopted by CEB in October 2008.[96] The executive secretaries noted that the Regional Coordination Mechanism was to address the policy issues with a focus on normative and analytical aspects, as well as on regional and subregional programming, including linkage to, and integration into, country-level development work, while the regional teams focused on providing coherent support to United Nations country teams and operational issues relating to the country level. This was in agreement with the regional teams, the main function of which is to provide leadership, strategic guidance and support to resident coordinators and the country teams for the achievement of country level results.[97]

118. In 2010, a paper by the regional commissions[98] aimed at further delineating the functions of the two mechanisms listed the objectives of the Regional Coordination Mechanism as:

(a) Providing a high-level policy forum to exchange views on major strategic developments and challenges faced by the regions and their subregions, and interaction of the regions with the global level;

(b) Promoting the United Nations system's policy coherence in response to identified regional priorities and initiatives, through Regional Coordination Mechanism working groups and clusters;

(c) Devising coherent regional policy responses to selected global priorities, and providing regional perspectives to the global level on issues such as the Millennium Development Goals, climate change and gender equality;

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[95] See JIU/REP/2009/9, on the role of the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General and Resident Coordinators. Benchmark 7 to be attained through: (a) Regional Coordination Mechanism providing policy, normative and analytical work on thematic issues at the regional and subregional level; (b) Regional Directors' Teams providing leadership, strategic guidance and support to regional commissions/United Nations country teams for the achievement of country-level operational goals; (c) Adopting consistent models for Regional Coordination Mechanisms and Regional Directors' Teams across the regions, while allowing for some additional functions as dictated by regional context and priorities; (d) Firmly placing Regional Coordination Mechanisms in the United Nations architecture comprising CEB and its three pillars; (e) Coordinating work plans and annual back-to-back meetings of Regional Coordination Mechanisms and Regional Directors' Teams; and (f) An effective, close and reciprocal relationship between UNDP, the regional arms of other agencies and the regional commissions.

[96] See CEB/2008/2.

[97] See https://undg.org/home/regional-teams.

[98] "System-wide Coherence at the Regional Level: Regional Coordination Mechanism and Regional Directors' Teams: Functions and Complementarities", 2010, available from http://regionalcommissions.org/sysrcm.pdf.

(d) Providing the forum for exchange of best practices and lessons learned and for inter-agency analysis and elaboration of interagency normative and analytical frameworks in response to priorities identified;

(e) Promoting joint programming on issues where regional normative and analytical work involves several agencies, for example, the regional roadmap for achieving the Millennium Development Goals;

(f) Promoting the United Nations system's interaction with non-United Nations regional and subregional organizations, for example, the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the League of Arab State, the Organization of American States, etc.;

(g) Promoting policy coherence and joint programming in support of regional and subregional integration efforts and initiatives.[99]

119. The 2010 paper by the regional commissions suggested deliverables for the Regional Coordination Mechanism, namely, joint analyses relating to major regional issues and challenges; joint regional publications; policy frameworks/regional action plans on transboundary issues and other relevant issues to be addressed at the regional level; regional policy guidelines on cross-sectoral issues; regional inputs to global conferences; regional mappings of expertise and programmes; and joint inter-agency regional and subregional programmes in support of regional initiatives and regional integration efforts.[100]

120. The paper also proposed how the work of the Regional Coordination Mechanism can feed into the United Nations Development Group regional team/Regional Directors' Teams and vice versa. In particular, the Mechanism could convey the outcome of its work on policy coherence to the regional team for their debate on country policies, and facilitate the integration of respective elements of regional and subregional programmes into the country United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks in support of the country development agenda. On the other hand, the regional team could bring national policy experiences to the Mechanism in order to draw lessons from these experiences at the regional level and serve to strengthen policy convergence.[101]

121. In spite of these attempts to clarify the respective roles of the Regional Coordination Mechanism and United Nations Development Group regional team, concerns remain over overlaps and duplication of efforts between them. On the basis of the information received during the preparation of the present report, it appears that none of the recommendations of the 2008 study have been fully implemented by all regional commissions. In many regions, there is still insufficient engagement between the two. Different definitions of "regions" by the regional commissions and the Group present additional challenges.

122. **The Inspectors are of the opinion that the regional commissions should analyse the feasibility and applicability of the recommendations of the 2008 study "United Nations Coherence at the Regional Level: Synergies and Complementarities between the Regional Coordination Mechanism and Regional Directors' Team" in consultation with United Nations Development Group regional teams in order to better align the Regional Coordination Mechanism**

[99] Ibid., para. 11.
[100] Ibid., para. 13.
[101] Ibid., para. 15.

and regional teams in their respective regions.[102] The Department of Economic and Social Affairs has recommended, in this context, to examine the extent to which the actual membership and representation overlap in both and to consider the practice of sharing their agendas to identify areas of interface and need for coordination.

123. Subsequent reviews of the regional commissions have reiterated the need to improve the role and functioning of the Regional Coordination Mechanism. In 2012, OIOS made a recommendation to ESCWA to "ensure that it plays a leadership role in the Regional Coordination Mechanism in the region by: (a) using its unique convening power to enhance its visibility and impact; and (b) establishing appropriate performance measures to self-assess its leadership role".[103] ESCWA included indicators on its leadership of the Regional Coordination Mechanism in its 2013 workplan,[104] and this recommendation has now been closed by OIOS.

124. ESCAP has noted that the Regional Coordination Mechanism plays an important role in strengthening cooperation, coordination and coherence and meets regularly, but it recognized that there remains scope for strengthening the role of the Mechanism in the Asia-Pacific region, including through the working groups, and for enhancement of synergies with the United Nations Development Group Asia-Pacific.

125. In its Management and Administration Review of ECLAC, the Joint Inspection Unit had recommended that "the Executive Secretary of ECLAC, in consultation with the United Nations Development Group regional team for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNDG/LAC), make a concrete proposal, establishing an agreed clear division of labour between the latter and the Regional Coordination Mechanism, including relevant cooperation procedures, with a view to enhance the coordination of United Nations activities and avoid the overlapping of coordination activities at the regional level".[105]

126. The Inspectors conclude that the Regional Coordination Mechanism is a critical instrument at the regional level, with the regional commissions as its main engine. To address the continued overlap between the Mechanism and the United Nations Development Group regional team, the Inspectors believe that the implementation of the following recommendation will help enhance efficiency of regional cooperation by clarifying the respective roles of the Mechanism and the Group and how they interact with each other, enabling both mechanisms to deliver better upon their respective objectives.

[102] ECA has noted in this context that the Regional Coordination Mechanism-Africa, which it leads, has been instrumental in improving coherence in the work of the United Nations system at the regional and subregional levels in support of the African Union and its New Partnership for Africa's Development programme in terms of experience-sharing and cross fertilization. Regional Coordination Mechanism-Africa has also been scaled up from a consultation to a coordination mechanism and has widened the scope of its coverage with the creation of additional clusters.

[103] See "Comprehensive Audit of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)", recommendation 1, available from http://usun.state.gov/documents/organization/211494.pdf.

[104] See Regional Coordination Mechanism for the Arab Region, terms of reference (2010).

[105] See review of management and administration in the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, JIU/NOTE/2013/2, recommendation 3.

Recommendation 5
The Economic and Social Council should review the existing legislation relating to the objectives and modalities of the Regional Coordination Mechanism, building on inputs from the regional commissions consolidated in a report of the Secretary-General, and taking into account the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 67/226 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, with a view to strengthening the coordination role of the Mechanism and clarifying its interface with the United Nations Development Group regional teams.

E. Cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

127. In principle, the regional commissions and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs should work closely together since they are United Nations Secretariat entities having similar economic and social functions. While all regional commissions agree on the importance of cooperation with the Department, many interviewees described their working relationships with the Department divisions as ad hoc and often based on personal connections rather than established mechanisms. Cooperation was assessed as good in some areas, for example, social development, preparation of the World Economic Situation and Prospects report, and minimal in others, for example, transport and trade facilitation.

128. One mechanism convened by the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs at the global level within which issues of cooperation among Secretariat entities on economic and social affairs are reviewed and priorities agreed is the Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs (ECESA).[106] The associated ECESA Plus mechanism extends to the United Nations Development Group and non-United Nations partners.[107] The objectives of ECESA include to "achieve a better balance between the global and regional dimensions of development, in terms of analysis, norm and standard setting and technical assistance",[108] thereby recognizing the importance of cooperation with the regional commissions. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs further noted that ECESA evolved to become ECESA Plus to ensure that the system as a whole would collaborate effectively towards the major intergovernmental processes, including follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the post-2015 development agenda, and the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway.

129. At the moment, the impetus of the ECESA working groups generally relies on who is leading. There are currently 10 working groups under ECESA. ECLAC, ESCAP and ESCWA are members of all 10 working groups, while ECA is a member of 9 and ECE participates in 8. ECA co-chairs the Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women cluster with UN-Women, ECE co-chairs the Sustainable Development, Human Settlements and Energy cluster with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ECLAC co-chairs the International Trade cluster with

[106] ECESA has 19 members, which include the five regional commissions. See www.un.org/en/development/other/ecesa/members.shtml.
[107] See www.uncsd2012.org/ecesaplus.html.
[108] See report of the Secretary-General on utilization of the development dividend, A/53/374, para. 4.

UNCTAD and the Population cluster with the Department, and ESCAP co-chairs the Macroeconomics and Finance and Statistics clusters with the Department.[109]

130. Additionally, the regional commissions have to work closely with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on mandates emanating from the functional commissions and expert bodies, as the Department is the primary entity supporting these bodies. The Department is also the co-chair of the United Nations Secretariat task team on the post-2015 development agenda.

131. The need to strengthen the relationship between the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the regional commissions has been recognised, including at the level of the principals. Problems relate mainly to insufficient knowledge at the technical level of work being done by either of the other and inadequate sharing of information on preparation and outcomes of events. ESCWA provided examples of recent steps it had taken to improve cooperation with the Department, including establishing an informal agreement that the latter would not undertake any field work in its region without informing the commission. This initiative was reported to have been shared with the other regional commissions.

132. Recent changes in the leadership of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, including at the Under-Secretary-General level, have also changed the impetus towards more cooperation. Some commissions noted improvement in their relationship with the Department over the past year, with videoconferences taking place at least quarterly among the regional commissions and the Department in the areas of population and statistics, as well as a focal point system for cooperation in areas like sustainable development, leading to constructive engagement on the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the post-2015 development agenda. **The Inspectors believe that the regional commissions and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs need to better and more systematically harness the expertise and comparative advantages of each other. Institutional mechanisms to promote the regular sharing of information between the Department and the regional commissions about current and future activities are an essential first step in this regard.**

F. The role of the Deputy Secretary-General

133. The General Assembly, in its resolution 52/12 B, established the post of Deputy Secretary-General, specifying as one of its functions to "support the Secretary-General in ensuring intersectoral and inter-institutional coherence of activities and programmes and to support the Secretary-General in elevating the profile and leadership of the United Nations in the economic and social spheres, including further efforts to strengthen the United Nations as a leading centre for development policy and development assistance".

134. In 1998, the Secretary-General requested the Deputy Secretary-General to convene Regional Coordination Mechanisms in each region.[110] The Deputy Secretary-General chairs on a quarterly basis an informal meeting of the executive secretaries through videoconference to ensure effective and timely contribution of the regional commissions to global processes. The regional commissions find the Deputy Secretary-General's chairing of the Mechanism to be very positive in garnering the

[109] See www.un.org/en/development/other/ecesa/clusters/women.shtml

[110] See report of the Secretary-General on regional cooperation in the economic, social and related field, E/1998/65, para. 17.

collaboration and cooperation of regional United Nations entities. The Inspectors are of the view that **in line with this established function, a more proactive role should be performed by the Deputy Secretary-General in coordinating development efforts. This includes enhancing cooperation of the regional commissions with other United Nations entities. In this regard, the Inspectors welcome the Deputy Secretary-General's initiative of holding a meeting with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the regional commissions in 2014.**

135. The Inspectors believe that the Deputy Secretary-General should continue to ensure and enhance coherence and cooperation between the regional commissions and other United Nations system entities, interceding appropriately, as and when necessary, to resolve differences, strengthen the relationship and reduce duplication. The Inspectors suggest that the implementation of the following recommendation will serve to enhance coordination and cooperation at the regional level.

Recommendation 6
The Secretary-General should consider requesting the Deputy Secretary-General to serve as a facilitator between the regional commissions and other United Nations system entities and assist, as and when needed, in the resolution of outstanding issues between them.

G. United Nations regional commissions and the post-2015 development agenda

136. The post-2015 development agenda is seen as a rare opportunity to tackle the overlapping roles and responsibilities and components of the United Nations system architecture which can no longer operate in fragmented silos. Sustainable development is about integration and multi-stakeholder approach, and the integration of its three pillars is new and challenging for both the United Nations and Governments. The post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals will require the United Nations, including the regional commissions, to work across disciplines and across organizations. There will be huge demand for cooperation and learning from each other's experiences.

137. Accordingly, the Secretary-General asked principals of the United Nations to report in writing by September 2014 on specific actions they are prepared to take in support of a coherent and coordinated system-wide approach to render the United Nations system competent in contributing to the transformative post-2015 agenda. This followed CEB discussions on how the United Nations system is to be made "fit for purpose" for delivery of the upcoming post-2015 development agenda.[111]

138. In January 2015, the Secretary-General acknowledged that "from development to peace to human rights, the United Nations must be ever more "fit for purpose". The United Nations development system, including the agencies, funds, programmes and regional commissions, is fully supporting efforts to shape and implement the new agenda."[112]

[111] CEB first regular session for 2014, "Post-2015 Development Agenda. United Nations system's Fit for Purpose", Rome. May 2014. Available from https://undg.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Item-1-CEB-2014-1-RETREAT-1-JOINT-CHAPEAU.pdf.

[112] See Secretary-General's press release SG/SM/16449-GA/11610-ORG/1591, available from www.un.org/press/en/2015/sgsm16449.doc.htm.

139. As indicated in chapter III, the General Assembly had, inter alia, made a specific reference in its resolution 66/288 to the role of the regional commissions in the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. The regional commissions have since then organized and participated in several initiatives at the regional level in pursuance of this mandate. The role of the regional commissions could possibly include an updated accountability framework at the regional level and hosting mechanisms for peer review of monitoring and implementation and aggregating national outcomes at the regional level as inputs into the global review.

140. The Inspectors **suggest that the Secretary-General continue to encourage United Nations system organizations, including the regional commissions, to clearly outline the distinct roles they each expect to play, in line with their corresponding mandates, towards the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, including identified areas for complementarity.**

VI. Interface between regional and global governance and decision-making bodies

A. Global governance structure

141. Adding the perspective of global and regional governance of the regional commissions and the interface between both the levels allows to see a holistic picture of the environment in which the regional commissions function. It also highlights the fact that the coherence of guidance and oversight provided to the regional commissions, can and should play a major role in assisting them to fulfil their mandates, including through enhanced mutual coordination and cooperation.

142. The regional commissions were established as subsidiaries of the Economic and Social Council and their budgets are determined by the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly. The founding resolutions and terms of reference of the regional commissions all include provisions affirming that they:

- Must act within the framework of the United Nations policies, subject to the general supervision of Economic and Social Council
- Require the approval of Economic and Social Council to establish appropriate subsidiary bodies
- Shall submit for prior consideration by Economic and Social Council any proposal for activities by the regional commission that would have important effects on the economy of the world as a whole
- Will establish cooperation with other regional commissions in accordance with resolutions and directives of Economic and Social Council and General Assembly
- Will be reviewed by Economic and Social Council.

143. **The founding resolutions of ECE, ECLAC, ECA and ESCWA also called upon them to submit to the Economic and Social Council each year a full report of their activities and plans, including those of the subsidiary bodies. This is no longer practised by the regional commissions, which instead produce individual reports to the Council** (overview of socioeconomic conditions in Africa; Asia-Pacific socioeconomic survey summary; economic situation in the ECE region;

survey of economic and social development in the Arab region; and economic situation and outlook in the ECLAC region).

144. The regional commissions have considerable autonomy to function through their respective regional structures. Their terms of reference specify that "any of the rules or procedures may be amended or suspended by the commission provided that these proposed amendments or suspensions do not attempt to set aside the terms of reference laid by the Economic and Social Council".[113] This follows from the General Assembly's recognition in the 1960s of the need to decentralize the United Nations' economic and social activities and to strengthen the role of the regional commissions.[114] In 1977, the General Assembly designated the regional commissions as the "main centres of general economic and social development for their respective regions" and required them to "exercise team leadership and responsibility for coordination and cooperation at the regional level".[115]

B. Regional governance structure

145. Each regional commission is governed by a Commission of its member countries which sets its programme of work. The Commissions are often supported by sectoral or technical committees of experts from Member States who prepare reports for the consideration of their governing bodies (details of the sectoral/technical committees for each regional commission are listed in the supplementary paper to the present report):[116]

(a) **ECA:** ECA is governed through annual meetings of the joint African Union/ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.[117] Being a forum for African ministers to discuss economic and social development issues, this joint structure acts also as the Commission of ECA. More direct governance is exercised at the subregional level by conferences, which replaced the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts.

(b) **ECE:** The Commission serves as the main legislative body of ECE and meets every two years. In between Commission sessions, the Executive Committee[118] of ECE acts on behalf of the Commission on all matters related to the governance of ECE activities, including the implementation of the overall guidance set by members of the Commission.

(c) **ECLAC:** The intergovernmental structure of ECLAC consists of the Ministerial Commission as the highest body, with its subsidiary bodies (committees, conferences and a council) reporting to it. The Commission meets every two years to

[113] See, for example, ECE terms of reference (2009 revision), E/ECE/778/Rev.5.

[114] See Blandine Destremau, "ESCWA: Striving for Regional Integration", *Unity and Diversity in Development Ideas: Perspectives from the UN Regional Commissions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

[115] See General Assembly resolution 32/197 on restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, annex, paras. 19 and 20.

[116] JIU/REP/2015/3_Supplementary_Paper.

[117] See ECA resolution 844 (XXXIX), Economic and Social Council resolution 2007/4.

[118] The Executive Committee has the same membership as the Commission, is presided by the representative of the country that chairs the Commission and meets as necessary at the request of the majority of its members. See Terms of reference and Rules of Procedure of the Executive Committee of ECE, EXE/EX/3.

set the priorities of ECLAC and discuss issues related to socioeconomic development in the region.[119]

(d) **ESCAP:** The Commission for Asia and the Pacific is the main legislative organ of ESCAP. It meets annually at the ministerial level to discuss and decide on sustainable economic and social development; recommendations of its subsidiary bodies and the executive secretary; and the strategic framework and programme of work of ESCAP. The Commission maintains close cooperation and consultation with the secretariat through the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and other Representatives, which is composed of ESCAP members and associate members, and meets regularly to advise and exchange views with the executive secretary on the work of ESCAP.

(e) **ESCWA:** The Commission is the highest governing body of ESCWA. Commission sessions are held once every two years in a senior official's segment and a Ministerial segment.[120] The subsidiary committees of the Commission assist it in formulating its work programme in their respective areas of competence and serve as points of interaction on programmatic issues between specialists from member countries and the secretariat.

C. "Disconnect" between the regional and the global structures and processes

146. As described above, the level and type of governance at the regional level varies considerably from region to region. In the case of ECE, for example, member countries play a more active role and meet more frequently to instruct and oversee the day-to-day activities of the regional commission. On the other hand, the Commission and committees of ECLAC meet less frequently and focus more on the broader priorities of the regional commission. **The review found that, usually, the stronger the governance structure of the regional commissions at the regional level, the weaker the linkages with the global governance structure.**

147. Through the responses to the Joint Inspection Unit questionnaire, all five regional commissions rated the governance structure at the regional level to be effective in enabling the achievement of their objectives and mandates. The governance structure at the global level, i.e. the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, was rated as "ineffective" by one, "neither effective nor ineffective" by another and "effective" by three.[121] Some regional commissions indicated that the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council had a greater role to play in providing political and operational guidance, and in promoting cooperation across the United Nations system.

148. On a number of occasions, inconsistencies were reported in the positions of Commission members and line ministry officials representing their Governments at the regional level and representatives of the same Governments at United Nations

[119] The Ministerial Commission has nine permanent bodies that provide Member States with a forum in which to adopt regional stances and formulate ECLAC mandates. See www.cepal.org/en/organos-subsidiarios.

[120] See ESCWA resolutions 158 (XIV) of 1987 and 196 (XVII) of 1994. See www.escwa.un.org/about/gov.asp.

[121] Assessment based on a close-ended question with the following response categories: "effective", "neither effective nor ineffective" and "ineffective".

Headquarters.[122] There need to be stronger linkages and coherence between representatives of Member States making decisions at the regional level about the activities of the regional commissions and the delegations of Member States making decisions at the global level about the programme budgets and strategic frameworks and overall activities of the United Nations in the economic and social sectors.

149. This "disconnect" was recognized by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1998/46, which stated that the activities of the regional commissions should be linked more effectively with the overall activities of the United Nations in the economic and social sectors.[123] The resolution mandated the Council to provide overall guidance for the work of the regional commissions in the preparations for and follow-up to major United Nations conferences in accordance with their respective mandates and priorities,[124] and asked it to encourage the regular exchange of information, as appropriate, between the regional commissions and its own Bureau. It called for the Council to "maintain its oversight and coordination role to ensure that decisions taken by the intergovernmental bodies of the regional commissions and the United Nations funds and programmes are complementary and mutually supportive".[125]

150. Despite this stipulation, senior officials from the regional commissions indicated that the Economic and Social Council had practically little oversight over the regional commissions as, unlike the funds and programmes, they did not report to Council but to their own governing bodies at the regional level. The reports of their governing bodies are issued with a symbol E/... which preserves the link with the Economic and Social Council. Members of some regional commissions have questioned the legislative mandates from the Council and the General Assembly, and instead prefer to revert to the primacy of the Commission's decisions at the regional level.

151. The Economic and Social Council holds a dialogue each year with the executive secretaries of the regional commissions after the high-level segment of its substantive session.[126] This interactive dialogue provides a forum for the exchange of information between Member States and the regional commissions on issues related to regional cooperation and emerging development priorities for the different regions. Recent dialogues have included regional perspectives on youth and development (July 2012) and regional perspectives on the post-2015 development agenda (July 2014). The General Assembly, in its resolution 68/1, reaffirmed that the Economic and Social Council "should conduct an annual dialogue with the executive secretaries of the regional commissions".[127]

152. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1998/46, called for ensuring "the active involvement and participation of the executive secretaries of the commissions, or their representatives, in the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Group".[128] It also welcomed, "whenever possible, the participation of the chairpersons of the regional

[122] A similar challenge was noted in JIU/REP/2013/3 on the "Selection and appointment process for United Nations Resident Coordinators" between line ministry officials (in the governing body of each organization) and representatives of the same governments at the country level.
[123] See Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46, annex III, para. 6.
[124] Ibid., para. 8.
[125] Ibid., para. 17.
[126] See Economic and Social Council decision 2004/323 on regional cooperation.
[127] See General Assembly resolution 68/1 On review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/16 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council, annex, para. 12.
[128] See Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46, annex III A, para. 6.

commissions in the relevant deliberations of the Council", encouraged "the participation of the executive secretaries, when feasible, in its high-level debates" and called for organizing "regular briefings of the Council by the executive secretaries ... during the meetings of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Group".[129]

153. There are also annual dialogues between the executive secretaries of the regional commissions and Member States in the Second Committee of the General Assembly. This allows for, inter alia, comparison and learning about the differences and similarities between the regions; enhanced understanding by Member States of the work and role of the regional commissions; and the provision of substantive inputs from a regional perspective into discussions and debates. Recent themes of these dialogues have included, in 2013, interregional cooperation as an enabler for the post-2015 development agenda and, in 2014, regional perspectives on means of implementation in support of the agenda.

154. The Inspectors are of the view that regular substantive and analytical reporting by the regional commissions to the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council would increase the level of attention paid by the global bodies to the regional commissions. This is imperative for the upcoming post-2015 development agenda, which seeks to link accountability at the global, regional, subregional and country levels. The Inspectors believe that the implementation of the following recommendation will enhance transparency and accountability in the work of the regional commissions.

Recommendation 7
The General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council should invite the regional commissions to submit, on an annual basis, substantive and analytical reports on their activities for discussion under the pertinent agenda items, with a view to enabling the Assembly and the Council to fully benefit from the work of the commissions and provide them with guidance and oversight at the global level.

155. The regional commissions need to do more to promote their work at the global level and better position themselves in the United Nations development system architecture. The Inspectors found that the work and added value of the regional commissions was clearly appreciated by Member States and most partners at the regional level, but not always at the global level. Many interviewees outside the region or the country in which a regional commission was operating admitted knowing little about what the commissions did, and opined that the products of the regional commissions were not made available in an easy, user-friendly manner. Overall, Member States interviewed in New York agreed that the perspectives of the regional commissions would add value to the discussions and deliberations at the global level.

156. Many products generated by the regional commissions are relevant to the sustainable development goals, including existing standards and international legal instruments that constitute global public goods. Several regional commissions suggested that, as is the case for the post-2015 development agenda, there should be a dedicated space for bringing in the regional perspective into the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. The regional commissions would serve as the

[129] See Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46, annex III C, para. 14.

first intergovernmental platform for regional reviews and the regional input could go to the forum.

157. The regional commissions highlighted that the bulk of their efforts should be mostly expended in the regions rather than at headquarters, addressing the needs and priorities of their member countries. As one executive secretary noted, "if we are relevant and indispensable in the regions, this will be reflected in New York". Nonetheless, the regional commissions acknowledged that additional efforts were necessary for enhancing their outreach and visibility in the United Nations headquarters. For example, ECLAC reported that it now conducted annual meetings with the permanent representatives of its member countries in New York. These meetings, held together with the UNDP Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, were reported to be well appreciated by the permanent missions in New York.

158. The Inspectors consider such meetings as a good practice and **recommend that the executive secretaries of the regional commissions brief annually their respective regional groupings at United Nations Headquarters in New York on the key developments and decisions taken by the regional commissions and the needs and priorities of the regions. These meetings should form part of a broader outreach and communication strategy developed by the regional commissions to promote their work at the global level.**

United Nations System Chief Executives Board

159. The desirability of participation of regional commissions in CEB and on other coordination platforms, such as the Secretary-General's policy committee, when relevant, was stated by all regional commissions. Currently, the Coordinator of the Regional Commissions and Director of the Regional Commissions New York Office attend CEB meetings but there is no space for the Coordinator to present or discuss regional issues. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs noted that, as a permanent member of the policy committee, when deemed appropriate, it sought the views of the regional commissions on topics tabled for discussion. However, in the view of the regional commissions, as they do not formally report to the Department, the latter is not in a position to represent their views.

160. Several regional commissions proposed that there should be a vehicle for regular interaction in CEB on regional issues through which their Coordinator could deliver the perspective from the regions. Overall, it would provide the space to see convergence of issues and for interregional cross-fertilization. As an example, the dialogue hosted by ECLAC in Santiago in March 2014 between the regional commissions and High-Level Committee on Programmes, the policy pillar of CEB, providing regional perspectives on a number of substantive issues, was well appreciated by the meeting participants and considered a good practice.[130]

161. Additionally, the value of the regional perspective was identified as providing a nuanced approach that acknowledges the differing circumstances of the regions and subregions. The regional commissions highlighted that there was a renewed and stronger regionalism that was shaping the post financial crisis world. In their 2011 report on the regional dimension of development and the United Nations system, the

[130] See United Nations' Regional Commissions Reaffirm Their Commitment to Support Member States through the Post-2015 Development Process, ECLAC Press Release, 19 March 2014. Available from www.unescap.org/news/united-nations%E2%80%99-regional-commissions-reaffirm-their-commitment-support-member-states-through.

regional commissions stated that a "new regional development architecture is evolving rapidly that needs to be understood, supported and partnered with, to promote sustainable economic, social, ecological and political development".[131]

162. The Inspectors believe that it is important for the heads of United Nations entities to be adequately informed of regional perspectives and developments. If the United Nations system is committed to establishing a clear linkage between the global, regional and country levels in delivering on the post-2015 development agenda, it should create more space to present regional perspectives to CEB and to other coordination platforms as appropriate.

163. **The Inspectors, therefore, recommend that the Secretary-General, as the Chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, propose the establishment of a regular agenda item at CEB to discuss developments at the regional level, including, where relevant, the analysis of the outcomes of the inter-agency, intergovernmental, expert and multi-stakeholder meetings, to be delivered by the Coordinator of the Regional Commissions. In addition, when a regional commission has a unique global mandate, the participation of the respective executive secretary should be ensured in the discussions, at least through videoconferencing.**

VII. Concluding observations

164. Although the focus of the present review is on cooperation among the regional commissions, the Inspectors would like to offer in conclusion a few observations of a wider nature, addressed to various stakeholders, including the Member States. Unlike the findings, conclusions and recommendations contained in the previous chapters, and on the basis of the formal methodology and tools, these observations are rather reflections of the Inspectors, based on their perceptions gathered while undertaking the review, and are offered as "food for thought" and a possible contribution to the ongoing discussions over the evolution of the United Nations development system and making it "fit for purpose".

165. The regional commissions were established and have evolved as an important arm of the United Nations to ensure the linkage between global decision-making and the specific and divergent needs of the various regions and subregions. Now that the United Nations is undergoing a seminal change in its development pillar, the role of the regional commissions needs to be readjusted to the new demanding requirements of the post-2015 environment.

166. In this context, fundamental questions emerge as to whether and how the regional commissions will find their proper place in the new setting alongside the other entities of the United Nations development system and what this place should be. How can they re-tool themselves to enhance their relevance and utility among their Member States and in the global community? And, on a broader scale, what kind of changes would be called for, in order to adapt their legislative mechanisms, structures, procedures, practices and oversight architectures to make them "fit for purpose"?

167. Equally, can a new relevance be crafted between the growing trend towards "regionalism" and "globalization"? Can both of these concepts be harnessed into productive and mutually sustaining synergies that can help the United Nations to

[131] See www.regionalcommissions.org/PrintRegionalDimensionStudy.pdf.

achieve the sustainable development goals? How can the regional commissions be made to contribute to enhanced coherence across the United Nations system at the regional level and ensure the linkage with the global mandates and needs?

168. The Inspectors put forward several suggestions that could inform further deliberations on these issues:

(a) The executive secretaries of the regional commissions should assume the primary responsibility for devising policies to firmly place the regional commissions on the map of the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals, and for ensuring the required synergies with the other relevant United Nations actors.

(b) The executive secretaries should conceive and implement a comprehensive outreach strategy with various stakeholders at the regional and global levels. In this context, the idea of setting up a "UN Regional" forum, of which the common online platform referred to in recommendation 3 can be a first stage, may become a useful tool. It should be fleshed out in such a way as to not only enhance the knowledge-management and the advocacy role of the regional commissions, but also help promote the coherence of the United Nations developmental activities at the regional level. Other key actors of the United Nations system could both contribute to and benefit from this tool.

(c) Furthermore, the executive secretaries are called upon to contribute to improving the interface between Regional Coordination Mechanism and the United Nations Development Group regional teams. They should help clarify the reasons why this interface has not been working as expected, and why the so-called "division of labour" has not been as effective on the ground as originally envisaged. Moreover, if attempts to enhance the operational synergies of the Mechanism and the regional teams do not eventually bring the desired results, it may be worthwhile to explore other possibilities, including the option of merging the two mechanisms and setting up an appropriate architecture for ensuring a better functioning of the new entity.

(d) One of the major difficulties with harmonizing cooperation across United Nations system entities in the area of development is the proliferation of bodies with often overlapping objectives and mandates. In its resolution 52/12 B, the General Assembly provided that the Deputy Secretary-General would have the responsibility to support the Secretary-General in ensuring intersectoral and inter-institutional coherence of activities and programmes and to support the Secretary-General in elevating the profile and leadership of the United Nations in the economic and social spheres, including further efforts to strengthen the United Nations as a leading centre for development policy and development assistance. With the increased complexity of the tasks assigned to numerous United Nations entities in implementing the upcoming post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals, the option of putting the Deputy Secretary-General in charge of overseeing the activities of the whole development pillar may deserve particular attention.

(e) It should be clear that the success of global initiatives like the post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals, will depend, to a large degree, on their successful implementation at the regional and at the national levels. Member States cannot and should not abandon their responsibility for providing strategic guidance and effective oversight over these processes. Without prejudice to the status of the regional commissions and their governing bodies at the regional level, their accountability lines should be clearly laid down and overseen by Member States through the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.

Annex I: Members and Associate Members of the regional commissions

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

Members:

Algeria	Djibouti	Madagascar	Sierra Leone
Angola	Egypt	Malawi	Somalia
Benin	Eritrea	Mali	South Africa
Botswana	Ethiopia	Mauritania	South Sudan
Burkina Faso	Equatorial Guinea	Mauritius	Sudan
Burundi	Gabon	Mozambique	Swaziland
Cabo Verde	Gambia	Morocco	Togo
Cameroon	Ghana	Namibia	Tunisia
Central African Republic	Guinea	Niger	Uganda
Chad	Guinea-Bissau	Nigeria	United Republic of Tanzania
Comoros	Kenya	Rwanda	Zambia
Congo	Lesotho	Sao Tome and Principe	Zimbabwe
Côte d'Ivoire	Liberia	Senegal	
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Libya	Seychelles	

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Members:

Albania	Finland	Luxembourg	Spain
Andorra	France	Malta	Sweden
Armenia	Georgia	Monaco	Switzerland
Austria	Germany	Montenegro	Tajikistan
Azerbaijan	Greece	Netherlands	the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Belarus	Hungary	Norway	Turkey
Belgium	Iceland	Poland	Turkmenistan
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ireland	Portugal	Ukraine
Bulgaria	Israel	Republic of Moldova	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Canada	Italy	Romania	United States of America
Croatia	Kazakhstan	Russian Federation	Uzbekistan
Cyprus	Kyrgyzstan	San Marino	
Czech Republic	Latvia	Serbia	
Denmark	Liechtenstein	Slovakia	
Estonia	Lithuania	Slovenia	

United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Members:

Antigua and Barbuda	Dominica	Jamaica	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Argentina	Dominican Republic	Japan	Spain
Bahamas	Ecuador	Mexico	Suriname
Barbados	El Salvador	Netherlands	Trinidad and Tobago
Belize	France	Nicaragua	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Germany	Panama	United States of America
Brazil	Grenada	Paraguay	Uruguay
Canada	Guatemala	Peru	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)
Chile	Guyana	Portugal	
Colombia	Haiti	Republic of Korea	
Costa Rica	Honduras	Saint Kitts and Nevis	
Cuba	Italy	Saint Lucia	

Associate members:

Anguilla	Cayman Islands	Montserrat	United States Virgin Islands
Aruba	Curaçao	Puerto Rico	
Bermuda	Guadeloupe	Sint Maarten	
British Virgin Islands	Martinique	Turks and Caicos Islands	

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Members:

Afghanistan	India	Nepal	Thailand
Armenia	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Netherlands	Timor-Leste
Australia	Japan	New Zealand	Tonga
Azerbaijan	Kazakhstan	Pakistan	Turkey
Bangladesh	Kiribati	Palau	Turkmenistan
Bhutan	Kyrgyzstan	Papua New Guinea	Tuvalu
Brunei Darussalam	Lao People's Democratic Republic	Philippines	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Cambodia	Malaysia	Republic of Korea	United States of America
China	Maldives	Russian Federation	Uzbekistan
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	Marshall Islands	Samoa	Vanuatu
Fiji	Micronesia (Federated States of)	Singapore	Viet Nam
France	Mongolia	Solomon Islands	
Georgia	Myanmar	Sri Lanka	
Indonesia	Nauru	Tajikistan	

Associate Members:

American Samoa	Guam	New Caledonia
Cook Islands	Hong Kong, China	Niue
French Polynesia	Macao, China	Northern Mariana Islands

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Members:

Bahrain	Lebanon	Saudi Arabia	United Arab Emirates
Egypt	Libya	State of Palestine	Yemen
Iraq	Morocco	Sudan	
Jordan	Oman	Syrian Arab Republic	
Kuwait	Qatar	Tunisia	

Annex II: Selected examples of mandates/roles given to the regional commissions by the functional commissions and expert bodies

(a) The Commission on Social Development called on regional commissions to convene high-level political meetings to review progress in fulfilling the outcomes of the World Summit for Social Development,[132] promote the exchange of experiences,[133] conduct regional reviews and appraisals[134] and implement the priorities of various initiatives and programmes pertaining to youth,[135] disabled persons and the ageing and the family.[136]

(b) The Commission on the Status of Women gave directives to the regional commissions including: developing databases and indicators on the status of women, analysing changes in women's situation in annual regional reports;[137] organizing regional conferences on women;[138] and strengthening the monitoring and implementation of action plans and platforms at the regional[139] and global levels. At the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Commission additionally called upon regional commissions to assist national Governments in their assessment of and reporting on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. In 2014, 20-year regional reviews of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were undertaken by the regional commissions.[140] The Economic and Social Council also requested the preparation of a special report on the status of Palestinian women with support from ESCWA.[141]

(c) The Commission on Sustainable Development (replaced by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development) emphasized an increasing role for the regional commissions,[142] mandating the regional commissions to organize regional implementation meetings in review years to further the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and to enhance dialogue on region-specific barriers, constraints and lessons learned.[143] In his 2013 report on lessons learned from the Commission,[144] the Secretary-General asked the regional commissions to organize discussions on issues specific to each region; review progress made against commitments, gaps and challenges; engage with all relevant regional actors; develop recommendations for the High-level Political Forum; and foster the mainstreaming of sustainable development at the national level.

(d) The Commission on Population and Development tasked the regional commissions to provide support in collaboration with other international actors in examining international migration and development including improving migrations

[132] See A/CONF.166/9.
[133] See E/2004/26-E/CN.5/2004/8.
[134] See E/2006/26-E/CN.5/2006/6.
[135] See E/2007/26-E/CN.5/2007/8.
[136] See E/2013/26-E/CN.5/2013/15, E/2014/26-E/CN.5/2014/10.
[137] See A/CONF.116128/Rev.1.
[138] See E/1992/24-E/CN.6/1992/13.
[139] See E/1994/27-E/CN.6/1994/14.
[140] See www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw59-2015/preparations#Regional.
[141] See E/CN.6/2015/L.2, para 9.
[142] See A/67/757.
[143] See E/2003/29-E/CN.17/2003/6, General Assembly resolution S-19/2 (2007).
[144] A/67/757.

statistics;[145] and in implementing the regional level Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.[146]

(e) The Statistical Commission emphasized the important role that regional commissions have in helping Member States to: implement revised systems of national accounts;[147] monitor the development of their national statistical services and identify areas where technical cooperation was needed;[148] work with other United Nation system actors to build national statistical capacity;[149] and to develop national programmes on gender statistics.[150]

(f) The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice asked the regional commissions to explore the possibility of developing regional mechanisms for monitoring victimization and providing recourse and/or redress for victims.[151]

(g) The Commission on Science and Technology for Development gave the regional commissions the lead role within the United Nations system to implement the regional level outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society and provide annual reports on its implementation.[152]

(h) The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues encouraged the regional commissions to undertake regional studies on the rights of indigenous peoples in preparation for high-level plenary meetings;[153] and coordinate with the United Nations Statistics Division on work relevant to indigenous people and census operations.[154]

[145] See E/1997/25-E/CN.9/1997/11.
[146] See General Assembly resolution 49/128.
[147] See E/1993/26-E/CN.3/1993/27.
[148] See E/1994/29-E/CN.3/1994/18.
[149] See CN.3/2010/34.
[150] See E/2011/24-E/CN.3/2011/37.
[151] See E/1998/30-E/CN.15/1998/11.
[152] See Economic and Social Council resolution 2014/27.
[153] See E/C.19/2014/11, E/2014/43.
[154] See E/C.19/2005/9-E/2005/43.

Annex III: Number of staff at each level dedicated to cooperation during the biennium 2012-2013 (as reported through the Joint Inspection Unit questionnaire)

1. The present annex provides evidence collected on the amount of staff resources during the biennium 2012-2013 dedicated to cooperation among the regional commissions, with the Regional Commissions New York Office and with other United Nations entities. The data was not reported consistently by the regional commissions; some were more detailed in their responses than others. Therefore, the data was not used in the main body of the report.

2. The Inspectors sought to test the hypothesis that, in order to be effective, cooperation did not necessarily require dedicated resources, that it should be part of the day-to-day work of the commissions. Projects, publications, events, etc. required resources, but information-sharing and consultation, for example, should be happening as part of the day-to-day work.

3. The table below gives an estimate from the regional commissions of staff resources dedicated to cooperation with other regional commissions, the Regional Commissions New York Office and other United Nations entities during the biennium 2012-2013, as reported through the questionnaire responses[155] and external comments provided to the draft version of the present report.

Number of staff at each level dedicated to cooperation during the biennium 2012-2013

Regional Commission	D1	P5	P4	P3	P2	G	Total
	Total number of staff at each level dedicated to cooperation with other regional commissions during the biennium 2012-2013						
ECA	-	0.15	0.34	0.14	-	1.15	1.78
ECE	0.04	0.3	0.41	1.61	1.1	0.56	4.02
ECLAC	-	2.2	0.6	0.8	0.8	4.4	8.8
ESCAP	0.1	0.3	0.8	0.25	0.1	1	2.55
ESCWA	0.13	0.83	1.13	0.5	0.13	1	3.72
TOTAL	0.27	3.78	3.28	3.3	2.13	8.11	20.87
	Total number of staff at each level dedicated to cooperation with the Regional Commissions New York Office during the biennium 2012-2013						
ECA	0.05	0.2	0.1	0.05	-	0.2	0.6
ECE	-	-	0.1	0.15	-	0	0.25
ECLAC	-	0.2	-	-	0.2	0	0.4
ESCAP	0.02	0.1	0.2	0.1	-	0.2	0.62
ESCWA	0.17	0.06	0.17	-	-	-	0.4
TOTAL	0.24	0.56	0.57	0.3	0.2	0.4	2.27
	Total number of staff at each level dedicated to cooperation with other United Nations entities during the biennium 2012-2013						
ECA	0.9	0.2	3.8	2.85	-	2.5	10.25
ECE	0.11	0.06	0.8	1.18	1.37	0.24	3.76

[155] The Joint Inspection Unit questionnaire requested the regional commissions to estimate staff resources dedicated to cooperation initiatives undertaken during the biennium 2012-2013 with the other regional commissions, the Regional Commissions New York Office and other United Nations system organizations.

ECLAC	-	0.2	0.1	1.4	0.3	1.75	3.75
ESCAP	0.3	0.8	2.3	0.7	0.25	2.6	6.95
ESCWA	0.35	2.38	2.61	0.8	2.52	2.25	10.91
TOTAL	1.66	3.64	9.61	6.93	4.44	9.34	35.62

Source: Joint Inspection Unit questionnaire responses and external comments to draft version of the present report.

4. The total number of staff dedicated to cooperation with other regional commissions was about 40 per cent of the total number of staff. The table demonstrates that a minimum level of dedicated resources was needed to enable cooperation among the regional commissions. On average, the regional commissions had 4.17 full time equivalent staff dedicated to cooperation with other regional commissions. All regional commissions also involved senior staff in cooperation, with staff at the P5 or D1 level having responsibilities in this area.

5. However, there was not a strong relationship between the number of staff members dedicated to cooperation and the number of coordination initiatives carried out. ECE, which was involved in the highest number of joint initiatives (77) after ESCAP (86), sustained this with less than the average level of dedicated resources. While ESCWA and ECLAC were involved in the joint lowest number of joint initiatives (34 each), the former dedicated 3.72 full time equivalent staff to cooperation while the latter had 8.8 full time equivalent staff. This suggests that the number of staff dedicated to cooperation is not a strong driver of the number of joint initiatives.

6. The number of staff reported as dedicated to cooperation with the Regional Commissions New York Office accounted for about 3 per cent of the total number of staff dedicated to cooperation during the biennium 2012-2013. The table shows that, on average, less than half of a full time equivalent staff member was dedicated to such cooperation.

7. The highest number of staff was dedicated during the biennium 2012-2013 to cooperation with the other United Nations system entities, as reported through the questionnaire responses. On average, the regional commissions dedicated 7.1 full time equivalent staff to cooperation with other United Nations system entities. This represented close to 60 per cent of the total staff time spent on cooperation, which was greater than the proportion of staff dedicated to cooperation with other regional commissions and the Regional Commissions New York Office. This is in line with the higher proportion of cooperation initiatives with other United Nations system entities than with other regional commissions and the Office.

8. The number of resources dedicated to cooperation is not correlated with the volume of joint initiatives. ECE and ECLAC, which reported the highest number of cooperation initiatives with other United Nations system entities, reported significantly fewer resources dedicated to such cooperation than ECLAC and ESCWA. While this review has not individually assessed the quality and value added of each cooperation initiative, the data strongly suggests that it is possible to cooperate without high levels of resources dedicated to cooperation.

Annex IV: Recommendations on improving synergies and complementarities between the Regional Coordination Mechanism and United Nations Development Group regional teams/Regional Directors' Teams

Recommendation
The regional commissions should share experience and good practice across the Regional Coordination Mechanisms toward formulating a more consistent "model" (adapted to the specific context of each region). The model should be: • Grounded in a clear and distinct role for the Regional Coordination Mechanisms • Focused on the regional/subregional agenda and thematic/policy coherence in a manner that ensures synergy and complementarity (vs. duplication and overlap) with the country- and operationally-focused Regional Directors' Teams • Based on accountability of the Mechanism and its members for measurable results and concrete time-bound work-plans The annual meetings of the regional commissions' Chiefs of Programme Planning should have a standing agenda item on Mechanisms to exchange information on developments related to the Mechanism and the experience of the regional commissions in their strategic coordination role.
To ensure sustainable success, the Regional Coordination Mechanisms should concentrate on a limited set of core functions and deliverables that, inter alia, leverage the comparative advantage of the Commissions in terms of their convening power, policy expertise and analytical capacity: • Promoting the necessary synergies in the normative, analytical and operational work of the United Nations at the regional level to ensure a coherent United Nations regional development agenda • Linkage across emerging global trends/issues, regional/subregional concerns and common country assessments/United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks with an emphasis on proposals for concrete responses at the regional level • Delivery of a limited number of regional/subregional thematic initiatives, including those to address transboundary issues, that require coordinated effort by multiple agencies, possibly through results-based "clusters"/thematic working groups • Support to United Nations country teams by "anchoring" network of United Nations system analytical, policy and advisory expertise in Region • Millennium Development Goals reporting and other joint products
The regional commissions, as conveners of the Regional Coordination Mechanism, should seek to place the Mechanism firmly within the United Nations architecture comprising CEB and its three pillars, and link the Mechanism to the High-Level Committee on Programmes in a manner similar to how the Regional Directors' Team is linked to the United Nations Development Group, but with greater flexibility to enable selective interaction on an "as needed/on-demand" basis
The regional commissions and other Regional Coordination Mechanism members should help disseminate knowledge of the potential contribution of the Mechanism, particularly to United Nations country teams and CEB machinery
The regional commissions should put in place a minimum level of required dedicated capacity to support the Regional Coordination Mechanisms, and leverage technology to the fullest possible extent through functional websites, regional knowledge management networks, etc. Contributions by member agencies in cash or in kind should be explored, particularly in support of specific collaborative initiatives/deliverables

Ensure a clear "division of labour" with the Regional Directors' Teams. The recommended division of labour can be broadly summarized as: ➢ On geography — Teams focus on country and Regional Coordination Mechanisms on the regional/subregional agenda, including its linkage to, and integration into, country-level development work ➢ On function — Teams focus on operations and Mechanisms on policy, normative and analytical work ➢ On the country-theme matrix — Teams focus on countries and Mechanisms on themes There necessarily will be "grey" areas
To ensure highest combined value-added (and to address any grey areas) on an ongoing basis, Regional Coordination Mechanisms should seek to coordinate their work-plans with those of the Regional Directors' Teams; the back-to-back annual meetings of the Teams and the Mechanism pioneered in the Latin America and Caribbean region, together with cross-participation in other meetings, could provide the "mechanism" for such a linkage, as could regular attendance of the regional commissions (also representing the Mechanism) at the Teams
The regional commissions should build and maintain an effective, close and reciprocal relationship with UNDP in the light of their respective leadership roles in the Regional Coordination Mechanisms and Regional Directors' Teams; they should also seek to strengthen relations with the regional arms of other agencies. The regional commissions should consult with UNDP in the preparation of the Annual meeting of the Mechanisms[156]

[156] *Source*: United Nations Coherence at the Regional Level: Synergies and Complementarities Between the Regional Coordination Mechanism and Regional Directors' Team, July 2008.

Annex V: Overview of actions to be taken by participating organizations on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit in JIU/REP/2015/3

		Intended impact	United Nations, its funds and programmes																Specialized agencies and IAEA											
			CEB	United Nations*	UNAIDS	UNCTAD	ITC	UNDP	UNEP	UNFPA	UN-Habitat	UNHCR	UNICEF	UNODC	UNOPS	UNRWA	UN-Women	WFP	FAO	IAEA	ICAO	ILO	IMO	ITU	UNESCO	UNIDO	UNWTO	UPU	WHO	WIPO	WMO
Report	For action		☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	For information		☒	☐	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒
Recommendation 1		c, f		O																										
Recommendation 2		f		O																										
Recommendation 3		b, c		O																										
Recommendation 4		a, h		O																										
Recommendation 5		h		L																										
Recommendation 6		c		E																										
Recommendation 7		a		L																										

Legend: L: Recommendation for decision by legislative organ **E:** Recommendation for action by executive head **O: others:** recommendation for action by the executive secretaries of the regional commissions

■ Recommendation does not require action by this organization

Intended impact: a: enhanced transparency and accountability **b:** dissemination of good/best practices **c:** enhanced coordination and cooperation **d:** strengthened coherence and harmonization **e:** enhanced control and compliance **f:** enhanced effectiveness **g:** significant financial savings **h:** enhanced efficiency **i:** other.

* The recommendations are addressed for action by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the executive secretaries of the five United Nations regional commissions.

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Regional cooperation

Cooperation among the United Nations regional commissions

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council his comments and those of the executive secretaries of the regional commissions on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Cooperation among the United Nations regional commissions" (A/70/677-E/2016/48).

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Summary

The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Cooperation among the United Nations regional commissions" aims to assess the relevance and effectiveness of cooperation among the regional commissions, cooperation between the regional commissions and other United Nations system entities and the interface between the regional and global governance and decision-making bodies of the regional commissions.

The present note reflects the views of the Secretary-General and of the executive secretaries of the regional commissions on the recommendations provided in the report.

I. General comments

1. The Secretary-General and the executive secretaries of the regional commissions welcome the report entitled "Cooperation among the regional commissions". They express appreciation for the analysis and recommendations by the Joint Inspection Unit on how to increase the contributions of the regional commissions to the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through enhanced coordination and cooperation among the commissions as well as with other United Nations entities at the country, regional and global levels.

2. The Secretary-General and the executive secretaries note that cooperation among the regional commissions has been ongoing for years as a means to provide effective and impactful deliverables to their member countries, whether in terms of knowledge products, policy analysis and advice or capacity development. Meeting the demands of the regions is the main incentive for the cooperation, which has therefore always been driven by substance.

3. With this in mind, the regional commissions have intensified their cooperation since 2008, including in response to the global financial and economic crisis. The resources provided through the Development Account of the United Nations proved particularly valuable in supporting concrete interregional projects among the commissions and in cross-fertilizing effective policies and expertise among the regions.

4. Cooperation among the regional commissions also gained momentum in 2014, with the appointment by the Secretary-General in November 2013, in consultation with the executive secretaries, of a Special Adviser on Interregional Policy Cooperation (November 2013). At their meeting in Santiago in March 2014, hosted by the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean as Coordinator, the regional commissions agreed on four criteria to guide the selection of areas for interregional policy cooperation, namely: (a) responding to demand driven by the regions; (b) catalysing a transformative agenda in the regions; (c) contributing to balanced sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda priorities in the regions; and (d) leveraging value added through the best collective expertise of the commissions. The executive secretaries also agreed to pursue interregional policy cooperation initiatives on three levels, namely: (a) cooperation addressing the regional-global nexus; (b) cooperation involving two or three regional commissions; and (c) cooperation involving United Nations and non-United Nations partners, including through the Regional Coordination Mechanism.

5. At the meeting, the executive secretaries also agreed to further promote cooperation among the regional commissions through a Development Account project on promoting equality. The momentum was carried forward into the meeting of the executive secretaries in Beirut in September 2015, hosted by the Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia as Coordinator. Additional specific areas of cooperation were endorsed at that meeting, including in support of sustainable energy.

6. It should be noted that the modalities of cooperation among the regional commissions are well established, including through regular meetings of the executive secretaries; the role of the executive secretary in assuming the function of Coordinator on an annual basis; and the role of the Regional Commissions

New York Office in supporting and promoting such cooperation. The executive secretaries therefore welcome and accept the recommendations by the Joint Inspection Unit to codify such practices, namely, through recommendations 1, 2 and 4. They also welcome the intent and thrust of the other recommendations included in the report, as detailed in the specific comments below.

II. Specific comments on recommendations

Recommendation 1

The executive secretaries of the regional commissions should develop and approve, by 2016, a formal modus operandi for the effective conduct of their regular meetings, including preparation of meeting agenda, formulation of objectives, follow-up and monitoring of implementation of the decisions, by assigning corresponding responsibilities to the Chiefs of Programme Planning and the Regional Commissions New York Office.

7. The executive secretaries accept the recommendation. The recommended modus operandi for the conduct of their regular meetings is being developed and will be adopted by 2016.

Recommendation 2

The executive secretaries of the regional commissions should develop and adopt, by 2016, specific terms of reference for the Coordinator of the Regional Commissions that detail his/her roles and responsibilities, including term limit and the modalities for coordination, consultation, decision-making, representation and handover from the incumbent Coordinator to the next.

8. The executive secretaries accept the recommendation. Specific terms of reference for the Coordinator are being developed and will be adopted by 2016.

Recommendation 3

The executive secretaries of the regional commissions should explore the possibility of establishing a common online platform for knowledge-management, more systematic exchanges of lessons learned and good practices as well as an advocacy tool, in order to increase the profile and visibility of their activities and promote their products at the global level.

9. The executive secretaries welcome the intent of the recommendation. Since the recommendation to establish a knowledge-based online platform for multiple purposes may require different types of platforms, the executive secretaries tasked their chiefs of programme planning and the Regional Commissions New York Office with reverting to them with a specific proposal.

Recommendation 4

The executive secretaries of the regional commissions should adopt, by 2016, specific terms of reference that clearly define the functions, responsibilities, resources and accountability of the Regional Commissions New York Office and adapt the job descriptions of the Director and the staff of the Office, as needed.

10. The executive secretaries accept the recommendation. Specific terms of reference for the Regional Commissions New York Office are being developed and will be adopted by 2016.

Recommendation 5

The Economic and Social Council should review the existing legislation relating to the objectives and modalities of the Regional Coordination Mechanism, building on inputs from the regional commissions consolidated in a report of the Secretary-General, and taking into account the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 67/226 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, with a view to strengthening the coordination role of the Mechanism and clarifying its interface with the United Nations Development Group regional teams.

11. The Secretary-General welcomes the recommendation. He will address the recommendation for consideration by the Economic and Social Council in his annual report to the Council on regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields.

Recommendation 6

The Secretary-General should consider requesting the Deputy Secretary-General to serve as a facilitator between the regional commissions and other United Nations system entities and assist, as and when needed, in the resolution of outstanding issues between them.

12. The Secretary-General welcomes the intent of the recommendation. He notes that the Deputy Secretary-General will continue to promote collaboration between entities to ensure intersectoral and inter-institutional coherence of activities and programmes in accordance with his delegated responsibilities.

Recommendation 7

The General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council should invite the regional commissions to submit, on an annual basis, substantive and analytical reports on their activities for discussion under the pertinent agenda items, with a view to enabling the Assembly and the Council to fully benefit from the work of the commissions and provide them with guidance and oversight at the global level.

13. The Secretary-General welcomes the intent of the recommendation and will abide by the decision of Member States on this matter. However, he notes the potential programme budget implications related to the production, editing and translation of such reports in the six official languages if they were to be mandated by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. In this regard, he suggests that, instead, consideration be given to enhancing the current practice used by the regional commissions to meet the intent of the recommendation by sharing pertinent information with the support of the Regional Commissions New York Office through the secretariats of the respective United Nations intergovernmental bodies and by establishing hyperlinks to the relevant agenda items allocated to the Second and Third Committees of the Assembly and to the relevant agenda items of the Economic and Social Council.